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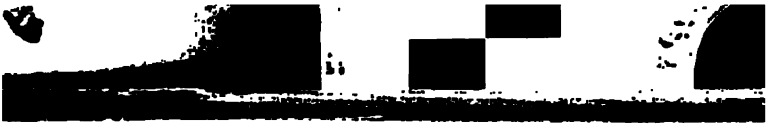

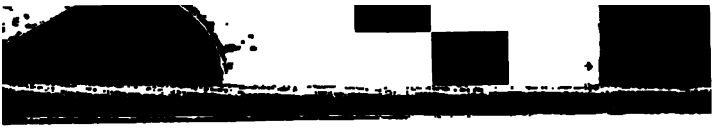

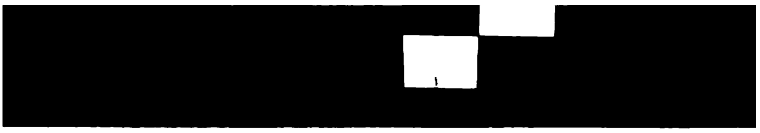

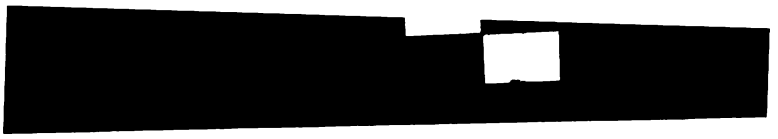

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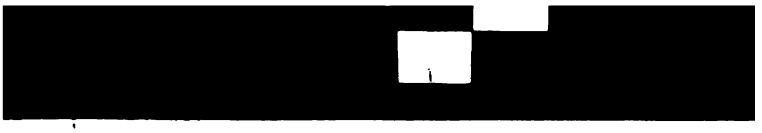

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"These big 'wireless' boats," she said sympathetically, "never let one get well away from trouble, even upon the ocean, do they?"

[*Page 224*]

WAYLAID BY WIRELESS

A Suspicion of a Warning, a Sporting Proposition, and a Transatlantic [illegible]

BY

EDWIN BALMER

ILLUSTRATED BY

EDMUND FREDERICK

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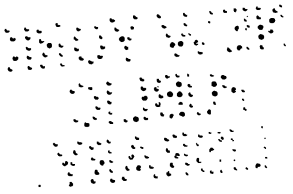

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WAYLAID BY WIRELESS

CHAPTER I

THE SUSPICION

"So it still keeps on?"

"Certainly it has occurred here again."

"But this must make the third time, now, within five days!"

"Rather the twelfth, I should say," the Englishman exacted sternly after a moment's computation, "within the past three weeks — within twenty days, indeed, *I* make it."

"Yes." The American accepted the correction easily, though he looked up from his breakfast chop with surprise. "Of course I meant that this is now the third time it has happened in the same town with us."

"And twice, indeed, in the same inn."

"Yes."

"Quite so!" the Englishman reaffirmed. He pondered gravely a moment. "This *is* the third time, as you say, Mr. Preston," he reviewed, "that these extraordinary thefts have happened in the same towns with us since you — ah — joined with me. And, I say, this *is* the second instance of these bobry burglaries in the very inn with us!"

"Well, Mr. Dunneston?" the American urged on, expectantly, as the Briton hesitated again.

"I say, my dear fellow, don't fancy I have entertained it an instant. I've never imagined it for a moment, I assure you." The Englishman bent nearer his young companion solicitously. "But — ah — Mr. Preston, tell me, will you, how many times have you happened to encounter this extraordinary series of crimes in towns where you were stopping before we — ah — met?"

The American laid down his knife and fork and straightened stiffly; but meeting the frank and all unoffending equanimity of the Briton's

curious concern for him, he controlled his first impulse and smiled in spite of himself.

The Englishman drew back at this affront. Young Preston stared at him incredulously; then laughed openly.

"I thought you had forgotten yourself, Mr. Dunneston," he returned. "So you were just remembering yourself and I had forgotten!"

"Forgotten, Mr. Preston?" the Briton repeated.

"Yes — you, you English, Mr. Dunneston," Preston explained. "If I had been travelling with any one else but an Englishman and he questioned me at the end of the week on the chances of my being a thief, I would — discourage that as an insult. But, of course, for a travelling Englishman, your query was scarcely personal. Since you have asked for the information, I have 'encountered' this series of crimes at least twice before — at Canterbury and, before that, at Chichester, though they had not yet begun to attract much attention."

"Only twice, then?" The Englishman leaned back, clearly a little relieved.

"As you have n't my genealogical table and know not a single ancestor of mine on either side, Mr. Dunneston," the American mocked on, "it was inexcusably vain of me to presume that an Englishman would hesitate to connect me with these robberies — merely from knowing me."

"But, my dear Mr. Preston," the Briton protested, "you 've no idea how I have hesitated on that very point, really! And I would n't press it now, in spite of those additional coincidences at Canterbury and Chichester, except — " he stared down a moment at the news column beside his plate; then he studied his young travelling acquaintance across the table — "that you mentioned to me the other day, Mr. Preston," he continued, "that you were stopping in Rochester the fortnight back and in Winchester the week's end before that."

"Why, yes, I did, Mr. Dunneston."

"I thought I recalled it. So, I say, surely you must see I 'm mentioning it only because some one must soon; and, besides, after jogging about half England with you, it 's my lookout, too; for it would be jolly humiliating to me, would n't it, to lose you to the police? So, do you know that the time given for the pilferings in Rochester and Winchester corresponds exactly with the time you were in those towns?"

"What, Mr. Dunneston!" Young Preston threw down his napkin and arose in his place. But again, as he stared down, flushed, into the Englishman's perplexed and anxious face, a calmer sense of the situation overcame him and he reached an impulsive hand for Mr. Dunneston's newspaper.

"I was not fair to you a moment ago, Mr. Dunneston," he admitted, as he glanced quickly down the column the Briton had had before him. "You did not hesitate to bring these facts to me," he indicated the newspaper as he returned it, "and suggest to me the possi-

bility of my being suspected as the perpetrator of these pilferings, as you call them. I am afraid that any chance acquaintance but an Englishman would have suggested it first to the police."

"And have the police pothering me here until the trial for my trouble? Oh, but I say, aside from that, and in spite of this array of — coincidences against you, Mr. Preston, I could n't stop myself forming so favorable an idea of you and so hoping to still have you with me," the Englishman confessed, "that I 'd drop the coincidences gladly, if I could only have some decently credible explanation for your — your certainly extraordinary actions about these little towns, sir, when you 're not with me."

"So I have some extraordinary actions to explain," young Preston inquired, as he reseated himself, "entirely apart from my circumstantial connection with these crimes?" He took up his knife and fork and cut into his second thick mutton chop, hot from the

ancient Ely grill. "I know that I am not exactly conventional in my ways of going about a country; but I was not aware that I have been acting so suspiciously about your little towns, Mr. Dunneston."

"You were not, sir?" the Englishman checked him. "Really, it seems you must have appreciated how you appeared to one watching you for a time like myself — particularly since you offered no explanation."

"Of what?"

"Of why you were touring these cathedral towns of ours, alone."

The American smiled again.

"I assure you it was n't my fault you found me alone, Mr. Dunneston. And I recognize," he laughed as he glanced down at himself, "that I 'm scarcely one of the sort that take the English cathedrals for their vacation. But you must mean something else. Besides being a man, in good health and spirits, and still touring the cathedral towns, what have I been doing which seemed so suspicious?"

"What? Almost everything! I have had to go about these towns to comply with the bally entail, as I told you, so I had observed you even before you joined with me. And how would you do? You would burst into the hotels and inns, where you Americans stop, and stand about glancing over new arrivals. You would search through all the bookings and trace the lists of the travelling Americans, and even look them up at the banks. Then, instead of showing any sort of interest in the cathedrals, to see which your countrymen and, particularly, your countrywomen tour through these towns, you seemed merely to be estimating the visitors to them. The remainder of the time you would mope about — planning or plotting, it might appear — and that night some rich American, carefully chosen from the travellers in the inns, would be most skilfully plundered — and you would move on. And then — "

But the Englishman had suddenly become conscious, as he elaborated his description, that

the young American's incomprehensible sense of humor was conquering him again. Before the Briton had checked himself, Preston was laughing at him outright.

"Is not that a fair account of how you appeared — and still appear at times, sir?" Dunneston demanded.

"I suppose — yes, of course it is, Mr. Dunneston!" Preston admitted. "So that was what first set your suspicions against me?" he cried.

"Obviously!" the Englishman replied. "So when I was confronted with this statement —" he tapped his newspaper — "I thought it might be the part of even a travelling acquaintance to warn you of its apparent purport!"

"If I appeared that way, I certainly can't blame you at all!" the young American's humor had now entirely restored itself. "And I did n't mean to hurt your feelings, Mr. Dunneston. Tell me the rest. Please go on!"

"That was quite all!" the Englishman returned, applying himself to his breakfast tea

and chop. He rattled over the newspaper till he found the editorial and read it slowly.

The American reached over to a neighboring table for another copy of the newspaper in which the Briton was absorbed. He glanced across, hopefully, before he spread it beside his plate; but the Englishman gave no encouraging sign.

He was a tall and thin Briton, obsessed by an ancient and exalted ancestry, and with heredity heavy upon him. Not only must his heavy, sombre features and gray eyes and dull black hair have been determined for him by some eminent progenitor at least six centuries before, but even their expression must have been decided and established then.

Young Preston could almost see his companion carefully copying the stern facial arrangement of that founder of the family who, sometime in the Middle Ages, had perfected the best expression for that countenance, perpetuated his triumph in a portrait and handed it soberly down for his descendants to profit

by. This particular descendant was devoid of a mustache; but either the founder must have worn one, or mustaches must have been prevalent somewhere in the direct line, for whenever he was absent-minded or annoyed, an hereditary habit seemed to hold this Dunneston; he brushed his shaven upper lip with his finger-tips and carefully twisted and arranged the atmosphere about an inch from his face.

Once in a while, as when with sudden interest in the column he was reading he involuntarily tipped his teacup too high, he was startled out of his ancestral expression. But, having wiped his lips and carefully dried his imaginary mustache, he regained his lineal sternness at once, and met the young American's gaze severely.

Preston laughed again with the delight of his irresponsibility. He was young, in most excellent health, and decidedly well looking. For three hard years, since graduating from his university in Massachusetts, he had been working without rest or vacation in the West.

And now, after those long thirty-six months of daily toil pushing the tracks of a railroad over the last virgin prairie, he had applied for a week's leave in June to attend his class triennial reunion.

With the grant of three accumulated months' vacation — with promotion promised at the end — he had "bounded," as he said, from his reunion aboard the first ship out of Boston to spend the summer in England, "roughing it in civilization."

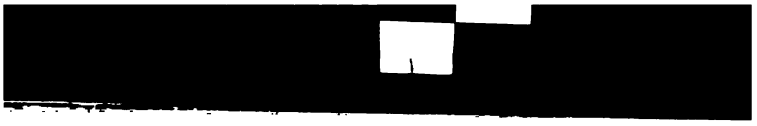
The close constraint of three years with grading gangs and cantalever bridges fell from him with his flannel shirts and corduroys. He smiled as he thought of the first time he went West, looking to the prairies to give him an interesting outlet to his disposition for excitement and activity. But he knew now what it meant to be "free" to do anything — but with nothing to do and, what was worse, without a kindred soul to share an experience with him.

He told himself that his longing, as he left,

was for no especial *one* — least of all, a girl. He merely wished to be with people again, civilized, interesting, and interested people. So he had taken himself to England as the country containing the most concentrated civilization and characteristics most in contrast to his prairies.

Three or four times, when he was a boy, his mother and older sisters had taken him with them to this England and toured him with most eminent propriety through all the cathedral towns. But this time he had come to see England of himself and aright, at last; and he was *not* to tour the cathedral cities.

In fact, when he got on the boat, he waited with unholy glee for the Mrs. Varris and her daughter, who had places beside his in the dining-salon, to confess their plan of touring those towns. Mrs. Varris was so very like his own mother that he was sure of her as soon as he saw her; so when they became acquainted and she confessed, he was very clever and satirical. But she only laughed and



asked him if he played bridge. He did, of course, though he laughed long and merrily at himself that night for having fled from his own mother and sisters. At least he could have done the French châteaux this summer with them; while here he was, after three years of exile, seriously contemplating a tour of the cathedral towns once more with — some one else's mother!

Very early the next morning he sought out that mother and her daughter to say the few final things which would make it impossible for him to find himself touring those towns again. And every day of the succeeding six to Southampton he had told them bravely of the superior things he would do and particularly of the glory of "roughing England" free from women and — with ultimate particularity — free from the cathedral towns. So as he saw them on the train at Southampton for Winchester, he had bid them a very superior farewell. But when their carriage had disappeared, he had looked down at himself to

try to recall exactly what his idea of seeing England, of himself and aright, had been.

He had recalled it with an effort and started boldly off; and then — he laughed now honestly at himself as he considered the fairness of the description the Englishman had just given of his subsequent behavior. For — with a few shamed intermissions — during the past three weeks since he landed, he had found himself bursting into the cathedral towns almost precisely as the Briton had said; and — doing the rest, as Mr. Dunneston had sketched to him.

And though he had not yet found *them,* for a healthy person who still retained some sense of humor, the cathedral towns had not been entirely without compensations. The first and greater was the Briton watching him sternly from across the table. The other? Young Preston applied himself to his newspaper.

CHAPTER II

THE CIRCUIT OF CRIME

"CONTINUATION of Crimes against our Visitors!" the heading announced. And under it the lines ran:

"The shocking series of crimes against Americans which have disgraced England this summer were continued — we dare not say culminated — last evening by the surprisingly simple and successful robbery of two American visitors stopping at the Royal Arms here in our own town of Ely.

"The extraordinarily evil fate which has pursued our cousins from across the water during the past few weeks, marked for victims in this instance Mrs. W. H. Hastings and her daughter, Miss Hastings, of Wilmington, Delaware, who only yesterday afternoon arrived at the Royal Arms. This morning,

according to the report made to the police, the considerable sum of money which they — very carelessly and incautiously, it must be confessed — carried with them chiefly in bank notes, was taken from their sleeping room in a manner which . . .

"Without useless speculation upon the exact manner in which this particular haul was made," the column ran rapidly on, "or without hazarding a guess of the criminal in this single instance, the *Morning News* desires to remind our county authorities again that it is high time for them to take more competent measures than have yet been taken to secure the safety of visitors in our English hotels and inns.

"Within the past three weeks — the beginning of which period marked the first arrival of our American summer visitors — the *News* has had occasion to chronicle in these columns no less than eleven similar outrages against Americans stopping in our inns which have had to be brought to the notice of our authorities.

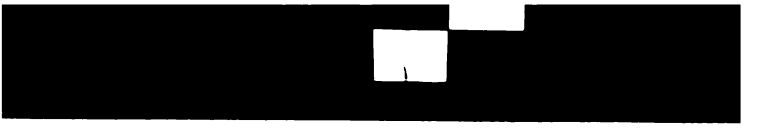
WAYLAID BY WIRELESS

" Beginning with the robbery of two well-known and wealthy Americans at Winchester just twenty days ago, the list rapidly swells with the repeated outrages perpetrated upon our visitors at Chichester, Canterbury, Rochester, St. Albans, Oxford, and a half-dozen other towns popular with Americans, including Norwich, in our neighboring county of Norfolk, from which we received word of the last robbery only two days since.

" The recapitulation of this list startles us, not only by showing the astonishing succession of the crimes, but by pointing out a most alarming condition. For from the first crime committed at Winchester twenty days ago to the scandal of the Royal Arms here at Ely last night, the cathedral towns of England — and the cathedral towns alone — have been the places of these repeated outrages practised upon our American cousins.

" However, the explanation may not be far to seek. As all Englishmen must know, the tour of these cathedral towns has been for

many years far the most fashionable and popular route for American women of means and refinement. From every ship landing at Southampton, scores of such travelling Americans make at once for the nearest cathedral town, Winchester, but a few miles north. Then, by way of Chichester, they travel on to world-famous old Canterbury in Kent. From there, by way of Rochester, further north in the same county, they usually continue on to St. Albans, and then to Oxford, usually stopping at Cambridge, too — though there is no cathedral there — before going to the east coast again for Norwich cathedral. From there, as we well know, they come here to view our magnificent ecclesiastical structure and stop a day or more before continuing on to Lincoln and York. At Durham, then, they turn south and, visiting Chester, Wells, and their other favorites in our west counties, they take a final view of Exeter's fine transeptal towers and board ship again at Portsmouth or Plymouth, content and satisfied with having



'done' in England only our cathedrals and their cities.

"Landing at Liverpool, the succession of the churches is merely changed by beginning at Chester and ending with Durham.

"For American women of the best class to travel over this route alone or with their daughters has become recognized in America as so customary and proper — if not positively necessary — that we have heard that Americans speak of this preference of their ladies as the 'cathedral habit'; and we have often clipped from American newspapers irreverent allusions to the travellers on our 'cathedral circuit.'

"That they should travel thus unattended is an undoubted compliment from our fair visitors, still we cannot view with entire complacency the carelessness and recklessness in money matters which has, not unnaturally, accompanied the increasing sense of security in our cathedral towns.

"For here at Ely, as at many other of our

famous old towns, it has become a matter of comment among banking agents that, while there has been a satisfactory and pleasing growth in travellers' drafts and credits, a remarkably large proportion of present transactions with Americans is mere exchange of large American notes for our currency.

"Obviously, in the care-free American manner, large and growing numbers of our visitors who once so universally carried credits which they cashed only as necessity arose, have now taken to the reckless habit of carrying their funds in currency — and funds sufficient, too, for the expenses of an entire summer's travel. This is the circumstance for which we must hold the Americans themselves to blame, in part at least, for the series of scandals which have been visited upon them this summer. For this circumstance, as it has become notorious, could not but have encouraged — almost invited — the shocking series of crimes which we have had to chronicle.

"And indeed, in every instance of the dozen

reported, including the robbery here at Ely last night, American currency in notes of large figure has been the chief or only thing procured by the robbers. And while it has been most fortunate that, in every case so far reported, the victims have been persons whose circumstances have made their losses inconvenient only temporarily, yet without some cooperation upon the part of the Americans, they cannot reasonably expect to continue unmolested — even in our cathedral towns."

"And this," young Preston cried appreciatively as he finished and folded the column over to tear off the strip, "is not only from mother's secure and innocuous old England! It is from her dear cathedral towns! Oh, I must send this to mother and sister, Mr. Dunneston!" he cried to his companion, apparently all forgetful of the warning the moment before. "To think that their dear old church cities would turn upon them this way!"

"What?" the Englishman looked up suddenly. He had not forgotten. "I say, but

don't you think this might make even one's mother or sisters a — a bit apprehensive, you know?"

"A bit apprehensive, Mr. Dunneston?" the American laughed. "I hope it will, if it will enable me to get them to England sometime to see something outside of a cathedral town! That 's why I want to send it. You can't appreciate it, of course, sir. Your family connection with the 'circuit' is too remote."

"But I did n't mean that, you know," the Englishman corrected. "I did n't mean make them apprehensive about the towns. The towns should soon be safe enough again. I meant, rather, might you not make even — even one's mother and sisters just a bit apprehensive, you know? Or — oh, I see," the Briton comprehended, as he saw what part of the paper Preston had been reading. "You were n't reading the editorial."

"The editorial," the American answered. "What is it?"

He answered himself as he turned to it hur-

riedly and read it, under his companion's watchful scrutiny.

"*An American!*" the heading stated confidently. And: —

"Elsewhere in these columns," the editorial read, "is the account of the cool robbery of two American women stopping at the Royal Arms — a robbery which is only the most recent of a dozen which, as already commented, have consecutively scandalized our cathedral cities this summer.

"We have already directed attention to the manner in which the Americans themselves have practically invited these thefts. But till to-day we confess that we had missed the most obvious meaning of the facts as we have given them but which, at last, a friendly correspondent has pointed out.

"Under the theory just communicated to us and which the separate police investigation of every crime serves only to confirm, there is now no possible reason for doubting that which many of us must have long suspected; viz.,

that this series of scandals which has been visited upon our sober cathedral cities is in no way native to them. These robberies cannot now, as was first feared, be attributed to a sudden and general outbreak of theft in our church cities. They have shown themselves too clearly, in their similarity and slow progression, as the work of one man — and that man not even an Englishman.

" The thief, who is moving about the circle of our cathedral cities with our American visitors, shows too intimate knowledge of the ways and manners of his victims in general, and makes too precise selections of those from whom he may make his invariably easy and profitable hauls, to be other than an American himself, born, bred, and travelled as such.

" As he clearly must mingle freely with his victims at their favorite stopping places and must, indeed, often be registered at the same hotels with them, it should be no great feat for our police to take him almost at once —

as there are few American men upon the cathedral tours.

"In this scandal, which was rapidly becoming almost international in its character, we are glad to assure our readers that the disgrace can now, upon the obvious evidences of the robberies themselves, safely be lifted from England and the English. So clear is the course which this remarkable American has left, that by tracing it back we can almost determine the vessel which brought him to our shores to commence, twenty days ago, his extraordinary visits upon his countrywomen travelling here. But while the name of the vessel, perhaps, may be a little too uncertain to place in print, yet it seems sure that the man must have landed at Southampton within the last three weeks, commencing at Winchester, a day or so later, the remarkable series of thefts which he has successfully continued till to-day.

"Whatever the extraordinary character and purpose of the sort of man he must be—for he must, almost conclusively, appear a gentle-

man — we congratulate him upon the preference which has prompted him, so far, to operate against only those who are well able to sustain those losses which become his gains. But at the same time we wish to warn him that, whoever he is, and for whatever purpose he has committed this series of crimes, he can not expect from English courts any possible palliation of his just punishment under the plea of a perverted prank."

"I see now, Mr. Dunneston. Thank you!" The American nodded gratefully across to his observing companion. "I landed, as you know, sir, from the *Britannia* at Southampton just three weeks ago; and, after casting about a day or so, dropped in on Winchester, as you accurately remember. And they think that this has been done — or rather, *is* being done — by some young American with the appearance of a gentleman and with a perverted sense of humor."

Preston laughed quietly to himself a moment.

"I don't believe I had better send mother

this!" he decided aloud. "As she would certainly claim for me at least a proper appearance, and has always had serious fears for my ideas of humor, this might well make even mother a bit — apprehensive, Mr. Dunneston. But you, sir! If you had read this before coming to talk it over with me, and had the — coincidences in mind, too, I certainly was not appreciative enough of your confidence in me. Why, Mr. Dunneston, knowing what you know, do you not feel that you are near to condoning a felony in keeping with me without informing the police? If you told them what you know, I certainly would not care to trust myself to the mercies of the police," he put aside his paper, "or to this editor, or to his clever correspondent. But — "

His face brightened irrepressibly and he caught himself staring incredulously through the wide doors of the breakfast-room into the morning lounge just beyond. He jumped up suddenly, and the Englishman arose and stood beside him in the doorway of the lounge.

THE CIRCUIT OF CRIME

"Miss Varris!" the young American exclaimed, with badly concealed joy.

"Mr. Preston!" a girl's clear voice returned gladly, as the trim, slender figure before them turned about. She was neither tall nor short, and she was neither athletic looking nor "soft." And she was neither beautiful nor handsome, but just at the point halfway between which a girl of twenty-three reaches who inherits good features and healthful figure, and who has learned to dance well, ride well, study enough, golf enough, and has attained the thousand other "well and enoughs" which include talking well and listening enough, and allow a woman to be liked and loved with so little consciousness that she never suspects she is particularly liked at all.

"She is the kind of girl," one of the men upon the boat had commented admiringly to Preston, "of whom the other women who do it themselves can't say that she pads, or powders, or wears other people's hair — though it is a wonder that she can have enough

of her own to wear it in the prevailing fashion."

"She is the kind of girl," Preston rejoined, "of whom other women would n't want to say that, if they could."

But young Preston, though fully conscious of the goodness of her appearance, was not most concerned with that just then. Though her first welcoming word was surely meant for only an acceptable greeting, he had imagined it held just a touch of the feminine relief in it which women travelling alone should properly feel upon finding a friend again; and he thrilled hotly with it.

The girl herself seemed to feel that she had betrayed something; for, as she released her hand, she laughed at him teasingly.

"But *what,* Mr. Preston," she demanded, "in the wide world can *you* be doing here in Ely, a *cathedral town? What* has brought *you* to this?"

"I can't tell *you!*" young Preston laughed joyfully, as the full realization of her pres-

ence came to him. "But I tell you that ever since I let that train with you puff away from me at Southampton, I have n't scrupled at searching even the cathedral towns to have a chance to find you again. Really, I 've searched the registers of every hotel, inn, and pension where there was any possibility of finding you. And then, just as I had almost decided that you were n't on land, but were an incredible sort of mermaid person whom one finds only at sea, I find you —"

"*I* find *you*," the girl laughed gayly, cutting him off. "After staying at the same inn with us for fourteen hours, you let *me* find *you!*"

"At the same inn, Miss Varris?"

"Yes; mother and I came last evening. But we had written for our rooms in advance and, as mother was tired, went to them at once without registering. And we went out to the police station early this morning before you came down; so there 's nothing for you to explain away."

"Then I was n't quite so — lacking, was I?

But to the police station, Miss Varris?" he asked quickly. "You went there? Why? You were n't robbed? The paper did n't make a mistake in the names?"

"Oh, no!" the girl laughed. "But we had been travelling for a few days with Mrs. Hastings who was robbed, so mother and I went with her to the magistrate this morning to place the formal complaint. I have just come back here ahead of them. I forgot something. No; to tell the truth, Mr. Preston," she said, looking at him frankly, "we had seen that you were here — and I did forget something, but I really made it an excuse to come back here and see you before you could see mother."

"You mean about the robbery?" Preston comprehended.

"Yes. She has been very much upset by what the police have just told her this morning — much more than she was before."

"Much more than before, Miss Varris?" Preston inquired.

"Yes; it 's queer, is n't it? You see, we

had heard about the robberies in the hotels before, of course. We heard about them every few days from some town or another; but as long as we thought that servants in the different places were doing it, mother did not worry much about it. But now the police have told her that it is some definite and dangerous person going about and doing it all, and that he is probably here still. And she had become almost sick over it."

"But why she especially, Miss Varris? Do you mean that you — "

"Yes," the girl assented. "This year, for the first time, we took practically everything in notes rather than in credit, just as all the people who have been robbed have done."

"But surely you can change it here."

"No. That is one of the things we went out this morning to do. There is a bank holiday to-day for some reason or other, and we can't change our funds into anything — even English notes."

"Oh; I see now," Preston smiled. "So you

want me, Miss Varris, when I see your mother, to try to counteract the effect of the police theory and convince her, at least till to-morrow, that there is no definite, dangerous man here at Ely."

"Exactly, Mr. Preston," the girl approved. "Will you?"

"Well, Miss Varris," Preston turned about smiling. The Englishman, who had been standing in the window a little behind, had moved away.

"Oh, Mr. Dunneston!" the American recalled him hastily. "Oh, Mr. Dunneston. I beg your pardon! Won't you wait a moment?"

"Miss Varris," he faced the girl as the Englishman returned courteously, "won't you let me present to you Mr. Dunneston, with whom I have been travelling in the cathedral towns for the past week? Mr. Dunneston, Miss Varris. Mrs. Varris, Miss Varris, and I crossed together upon the *Britannia*.

"I am sure," he continued, as the girl bowed cordially to the Englishman, "that you will agree, in a moment, that I am brave in pre-

senting Mr. Dunneston; and you, Mr. Dunneston, must admit that I am recklessly regardless of a most promising haul."

"Brave?" the girl asked, puzzled, turning uncertainly from her countryman to the Briton. "And recklessly regardless? What do you mean?"

"I mean," the American replied, "that you have just come to me and told me that your mother is in the most susceptible position for an easy and profitable robbery."

"Yes?"

"And you have asked me to convince her that the definite, dangerous person, who operates against such susceptible Americans, does not exist; whereas —"

"Yes; whereas —?" the girl led on encouragingly.

"Just before you came, Mr. Dunneston was presenting me with a most formidable array of facts to convince me — at least he was suggesting to me," Preston substituted, "that I am the man!"

CHAPTER III

THE GIRL TO THE RESCUE

"HE was suggesting to you that you are — the thief?" the girl turned uncertainly from the Englishman to the American again. "Oh — not seriously, of course!"

"In all British seriousness, Miss Varris," Preston replied.

"Ah; but I say, Mr. Preston, I say —" the Englishman began.

"Of course, Miss Varris," the American went on, "to be fair, you must understand that Mr. Dunneston was not doing it in a personal or offensive way at all. He was merely pointing out in a friendly manner how directly the facts of the case proved against me; was n't that it, sir?"

"Ah; but I told you, Mr. Preston," the Englishman replied, "that as no other plaus-

ible explanation covered the facts as I knew them a moment back, I was forced to consider the points of your connection with these cathedral crimes, sir. But I am not all sure now, Mr. Preston and Miss Varris," he nodded reassuringly to the young people. "Perhaps as plausible and certainly a preferable explanation of Mr. Preston's peculiar conduct may be considered which would render his connection with the crimes still — still extraordinarily coincidental," he warned fairly, "but inconclusive — oh, quite inconclusive!"

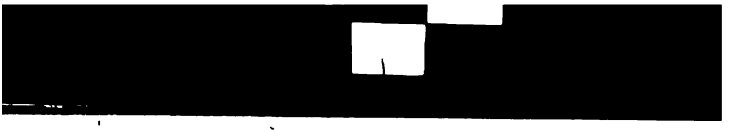
"Why; what do you mean?" the girl looked to the Englishman. But Preston nodded his acknowledgment to the Briton and moved to lead her away.

"Thank you, Mr. Dunneston!" he forestalled further explanation. "Thank you, sir!"

The girl hesitated a moment; then gave her hand frankly to the Englishman.

"We shall see you again, Mr. Dunneston?" she said.

"Awfully good of him to think the case



against me is now at least inconclusive, is n't it?" Preston laughed with the girl as they moved away. "Really, Miss Varris, you appeared just in time to save me from arrest, I fear."

"How? What *do* you mean?"

"Well, you see, I have been travelling only eight days now with Mr. Dunneston. I had told him that I was in Winchester and Rochester and a few other places about the time of the robberies there, and he knows of himself that I have established a certainly 'extraordinarily coincidental' connection with the past three crimes. Also, he has no way of knowing whether or not I am an hereditary thief, so he was just considering whether it was his duty to have the police investigate me, when you came up and saved me."

"But that is just what I don't understand," the girl returned. "How could that clear you from the suspicions you say he was holding against you?"

"Oh, he said you gave him," Preston re-

plied vaguely, "a plausible and preferable explanation of certain actions of mine which had puzzled him — particularly my dubitable presence upon this cathedral tour."

"But how?" the girl persisted.

"Oh — let 's not analyze! You 've done it, and, if I know the English, you 've made him now really unnaturally trustful of me. But, Miss Varris, where is Mrs. Varris?" he changed suddenly.

"She was to go over to the cathedral with Mrs. Hastings. And I told her I would return there."

"Can we find her there now, then?"

"*We,* Mr. Preston?" the girl teased.

"Oh, I forgot." Preston met her easily. "Your mother has the family funds, has n't she? And after what you have heard you can't quite consider my connection with the crimes inconclusive enough so that you dare to take me to her."

"Yes; you *have* evidently forgotten, Mr. Preston," the girl retorted.

"What?"

"What you have said at many and various times about cathedrals — and about cathedral towns, too. And also, if I recall correctly, you must be forgetting a good many of your volunteered comments upon persons who 'do' the churches and their cities. I shall be *very* glad to take you, of course; but do you dare go?"

"Test me!"

"But what *are* you doing in this town, Mr. Preston?" the girl asked, half amused, half puzzled. "And not only what are you doing in Ely, but what were you doing in the other cathedral towns where you established that 'at least extraordinarily coincidental connection' of yours with crime? And what were your remarkable actions which were so inexplicably suspicious?"

"Must you know before you finally decide whether it is safe to take me to Mrs. Varris and the treasure — hand-bag?"

"Of course! And also how you attached

yourself to — Mr. Dunneston, is n't it, with his delightfully inconclusive suspicions."

"Come then," Preston laughed as he led out upon the lawn.

It was the very hour of perfection in the heart of an English morning, when the adjustments of the dawn with the day are over and all the land has settled itself in security and quiet to the serene sufficiency of its established toil.

Toward the tiny, town market-place country carts creaked sturdily down the bedded road, while the bees boomed about the warm honeysuckle against the green walls on either side of the ancient way, and the red and yellow poppies and field flowers opened their blossoms slowly to deck discreetly the even acres of the growing grain.

The American, as he came out to that peaceful country, quivered gladly with the delight of it all — the clipped hedgerow and speckless road, the serried spinneys and shining copse, the red-roofed, vine-clad, gray stone cottages

with the gleaming fens and willow banks of the little stream beyond. And above, touching the clear blue sky, climbed the Norman and old English towers of Ely, carved clear and crested by the sun; while below, the white-fleeced sheep grazed in the grass at their base, almost within their cool shadow.

The calm, settled, and irrevocable manner and mind of this whole peaceful countryside and its people came to the young American with unexpressible understanding as he drew in with his breath the deep satisfaction and firm establishment of their very air. Many times before, and for many, many weeks when he was a boy he had come over to this England with his mother and sisters and their friends. But for three weeks this time he had been alone — solitary and untended of his own countrymen in England. And he felt he was just beginning to sound the hitherto all unsuspected depths of the fundamental differences — the delightful and discreet, oh, eminently discreet, differences which distinguish

the understanding of the Englishman and the American. As he reckoned it over in the settled glory of the sunlight, he smiled jubilantly at the expectant girl beside him.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Oh, I was just thinking about the English in general," he said, "and most particularly of the especial gorgeousness of my Englishman."

"Oh; Mr. Dunneston?" the girl encouraged.

"Yes; that is, I think that 's his name."

"Why, don't you *know* his name?" the girl asked, puzzled. "I thought you said you had been travelling with him for eight days."

"I have — in which period I have elicited everything else and was just reaching the name. I thought you knew," Preston smiled, "that as the name is the first thing one finds from an American, it 's the last from an Englishman. But as I got it from his luggage last week and have been calling him by it ever since, I suspect he will feel confidential enough

to confess it to me pretty soon now. I think we 've gone through almost everything else."

"Then tell me about him first," the girl commanded. "There 's something so delightfully British and — foreboding about him that I —"

"Foreboding! Foreboding 's just the word, Miss Varris," Preston congratulated. "I 've been trying to think ever since I met him exactly what his charm was and — 'delightfully foreboding,' that 's it!"

"Tell me then," the girl asked again impatiently, "where did you meet him, and how?"

CHAPTER IV

THE FOREBODING BRITON

"I RAN across him down at St. Albans last week," Preston obeyed willingly as they loitered easily along. "I had just come into town and concluded my frantic search of the inns — for what purpose you can decide for yourself later — and had been moping about most of the afternoon.

"After dinner, however, I dropped into the billiard room. My foreboding friend was in there with five or six other properly depressed and conventionally bored Britons playing pool. They had made up one of those pleasant little games where every player has a ball of a different color and the object of each player is to pocket as many of the other balls as possible. Every time he pockets a ball of a color not his own, he collects a shilling from the

owner of the ball. The marker is the polite medium of the money.

"Well, their game was just getting to be expensive enough to be sociable when I dropped in and looked on longingly.

"As usual when an American enters the room, the British drew defensively together and waited patiently for me to shock or offend them. But as I did neither at once, they decided they had made a mistake, and that I must be a Canadian, or an Australian, or a South African, or somehow belong to the Empire, for before long one of them asked me to join the game.

"I discovered then that though it is highly commendable to take money from a stranger, it is not good etiquette for the true Briton to keep it. So, to solve the difficulty presented by the desire to win my shillings without obliging any one to receive money from me, they decided to play for charity; and with that worthy object to play for half a crown a point instead of a shilling.

"They had on the wall a box for contributions for the housing and sustenance of invalided cricketers, or inveterate smokers, or some other especially pitiful group of incurables who particularly appeal to the British heart; and every time any of us pocketed a ball, the owner dropped his half crown into this willing receptacle.

"Well, the Britons had me buying crutches and cigars for the home at the very start; but, about half-past nine, the whole seven of them began to play in real form, and I must have had half the invalids in the kingdom well started toward convalescence, when the whole crowd in succession put down my ball again.

"I had stopped paying in half crowns some time before, and was dropping in gold. I took a sovereign from my pocket, therefore, and went over to drop it dutifully into the box when I noticed, with new appreciation, the sign pasted above it — "This box is for voluntary contributions only!"

"I turned about to the English and smiled

hopefully and said, 'Gentlemen, up to this point, of course, it has been all right to use this box. And, of course, I am still glad to support this worthy charity. But do you not think, gentlemen, that I could put this last mite more conscientiously into some of the other boxes?'

"Well, believe me, Miss Varris, the whole seven of them, marker and all, stopped the game, put down their cues, and filed by and shook and examined the box; ascertained that it was not yet full; made sure from the proprietor of the inn that the contents were properly counted, that a receipt was regularly given, and the funds turned over weekly to the authorized collector for the Home. Then they went into executive session as to whether or not each player should not have the right to choose his own charity.

"I listened sadly for a while, then apologized for breaking up their jolly little game, and went to bed."

"Yes; and then?" the girl asked, as he paused.

"Oh, the next morning when we were all in the hotel lounge — there had been a robbery the evening before and I was standing about, watching the intense lack of excitement — old Dunneston came up to me. I could see that he had been thinking over the difficulty half the night. But he had fairly determined it at last and was in peace.

"'I say, Mr. Preston,' he said, 'I say, Mr. Preston,' — and you 've heard the way he says it, — 'it was rather that word "voluntary" that you stuck at a bit last night, now was n't it, what?'"

"And what did you say?"

"Nothing. What could I? I grasped his hand in gratitude — I had then decided to keep at the cathedral towns regularly rather than haphazard — and, as I found that Mr. Dunneston, too, was committed to them for a while, I attached myself skilfully to him and have been with him ever since. Do you blame me?"

"Quite the opposite!" the girl replied. "But since you evidently wish to keep me in

suspense about your mysterious purpose in these towns, at least tell me what has committed Mr. Dunneston to them."

"What? Oh, didn't I tell you? He's qualifying for his income!"

"Qualifying for his income — by going about the cathedral towns?"

"Exactly." Preston smiled again as he recollected. "You see, so far as old John Bull has volunteered already, it seems that the founder of the family — whom he tells me he resembles, by the way — was some able old baronial marauder before the War of the Roses, or sometime 'way back when people still used to repent of the way they got their money. At any rate, this old chap, after robbing on foot and horseback till he had gathered an estate to entail, repented just before he died and made a penitential round of every cathedral then standing in England to gain forgiveness for making the money.

"Now, I couldn't quite make out from Dunneston whether his worthy ancestor en-

joyed that tour so much that he wished no one else to miss it, or whether an opposite emotion led him to enjoin it upon his descendants. At any rate, he put the requirement into the entail that before entering upon his property every heir must make the round of the same churches and ask forgiveness for taking the money, I suppose. So, Dunneston's uncle having just died, Dunneston has procured from his barristers a list of the cathedrals standing as such in England in 1369, when his ancestor went around, and he is now making what he calls his 'qualifying round' of the church course." Preston looked down doubtfully. "He says he's now nine up and eleven still to pray," he ventured.

"I am glad," the girl smiled up at him forgivingly, "that you had the shame to attribute that to poor Mr. Dunneston."

"Oh, he's capable of worse — I mean much better than that, Miss Varris, really," Preston let himself go on, encouraged. "He was telling me just the other day that, thanks to the

daily services, he expects to complete the round for a total of about thirty-five days. Bogie, he says, is thirty; and his great-uncle, who went about the course when they were making no repairs, made it in twenty-nine. Really, Miss Varris," he checked himself cautiously, "the English sense of humor is n't less than ours; it 's merely different. Take the way they talk about themselves, for instance."

"What do you mean?" the girl asked.

"Well, I told you just a moment ago that Mr. Dunneston has n't confided his name to me yet. He has n't; but that 's about the only thing he 's withheld. He has told me fully and freely about himself and all his family and their affairs, how his father and mother fight, about his differences with his sisters, and all about his bad brother in the colonies, and what his cousins think of him, and about the family gout, and —"

"The *what*, Mr. Preston?" the girl broke in. "I don't want to interrupt again, truly. But the what, did you say? The family what?"

"The gout; the family gout. Don't laugh, now; I'm serious. He has told me all about it. And he has it — the gout, I mean, at times. It's the pride of his branch of the family. The other branch — the branch with the title — haven't the gout at all, apparently. I can't quite make out which counts the most with the English in general as an indication of aristocracy, the title or the gout; but Dunneston clearly considers the bandaged foot a far more conclusive evidence of blue blood than the coroneted head."

He caught his companion smiling up at him patiently again.

"Oh! I was saying that an Englishman will talk about his personal affairs as if they belonged to some one else; but tell you his name — never. Now, an American is just the other way. The first thing he tells is his name; but he will never mention — that is, any sort of an American won't — anything which we call personal. I think the English can't consider the same things personal. Yet

the same Englishman who 'll tell all his private scandal will, as I said, leave you to get his name from his luggage. And if, after that, you call him by name, he 'll blush. Truly.

"You see, Miss Varris," he explained, "the American tells you his name and can't tell you anything more about himself without making it personal. But the Englishman, by not telling his name, can tell any private affair without recollecting that it is about himself at all. Really, I have believed sometimes that they forget that they themselves are present. That must be why it shocks them so to call them by name. It makes them remember."

"Oh! Now I see!" the girl comprehended at length. "And just before I came in Mr. Dunneston was discussing you in the same spirit?"

"Precisely!" Preston affirmed. "He had begun to fear that I was a thief; so, instead of romping off to discuss me with some third person, he merely went over the matter impersonally with me. And, while I do not deny

Far off to starboard the extreme point of Cornwall slid into the sea
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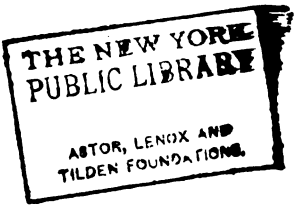
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there are defects in such a habit, I must admit that — from the point of view of the suspected one, at least — it has its advantages. But — is n't that Mrs. Varris with the gray parasol there waiting in front of 'Galilee'?"

They had halted before the wonderful west front of Ely, with the great castellated west tower, which seemed more military than ecclesiastical, standing as high sentinel to the blue heavens above them.

The ineffable sense of peace and calmness and permanency which breathed over them in the presence of that sure, commanding quiet in those mounting masses of carved and chiselled stone, struck the laugh and joke from their lips.

In the awe which always came to him as he confronted one of these wonderful buildings, young Preston turned to the girl gazing up at the tower before them.

"Do you remember, Miss Varris," he said quietly, "being made to read some of the really great books long before you could pos-

sibly appreciate them; or being made to play, all uncomprehending, the great piece of music which could not yet be great to you — only difficult?"

"Yes," the girl replied, "I do."

"And when you finally are of the age to appreciate them, don't you always still find yourself rather — resenting them, therefore, in spite of yourself?"

"Yes," the girl said again; "why?"

"Because that is the way I have had to feel, in spite of myself, about these wonderful piles of architecture — and even about the churches themselves. Yet I can't help having a sneaking respect for them, after all. Especially Ely here. I remember, even as a boy I used to like it best; because here on the Isle of Ely I knew that Hereward, the 'last of the English,' made the last stand of the Saxons and held out against the Normans, after the Conquest, for almost five years. I always liked Ely. And I hope you understand my feeling against cathedrals in general," he concluded

earnestly. "It is n't really against the cathedrals — or the towns. It 's against the way we Americans take them; and against what we make them — a fashion."

"I know, of course," the girl replied, meeting his glance evenly. "And I hate it myself — though I have to do it. And mother just enjoys it thoroughly and does n't think about it at all."

"I did n't mean to criticise you!" Preston cried guiltily. "I don't think your mother does it in the 'fashionable' way at all. But — I 'm glad you hate it too, just the same," he confessed honestly.

"But now, Mr. Preston, explain yourself!" the girl cut short their serious confidences and turned to him teasingly again. "What are you doing here about these towns? You have evaded long enough. Confess!"

"Your mother sees us!" Preston replied. "Come. She is waiting. Or are n't you sure yet it is safe to take me to her without knowing why I am about these towns?"

"Well; I warn you that mother will require a reason much more than I. Remember, you 've said even more to her than to me against 'her' cathedrals!" And:

"Mr. Preston!" Mrs. Varris's voice, true and clear as the girl's, greeted the young American with well feigned astonishment. "We hoped for this," she teased on, almost like the girl herself, "when we saw your name on the register this morning. And, as we were not registered, I was going to leave a note for you; but when I recollected your expressed feelings about these towns, I thought it *could n't* be you."

"Well — I, at least, Mrs. Varris," he replied, "am glad it is!"

"Oh, so are we — indeed!" she protested. "But *what* are you doing here?"

Preston looked down at the girl with an acknowledging smile. As he glanced up again, the Englishman they had left at the inn twenty minutes before came about the north front of the cathedral and advanced toward them.

"Look, Mr. Preston!" the girl interrupted, as the young American was about to reply. "Here is Mr. Dunneston. His eye is upon you!"

"I wonder what's happened?" Preston mused. "He's certainly even more foreboding than usual and his suspicions don't seem half so inconclusive as they were when we left him."

"I wonder —" the girl began.

"Oh, Mrs. Varris!" Preston recollected suddenly. "I beg your pardon. But perhaps I was getting to your answer after all.

"I suggested a partial explanation, or rather, excuse, for my presence about these towns which, if it did n't satisfy Miss Varris, at least seemed to reassure my travelling companion of the past week. Here he is. But now it does n't seem to satisfy even him, so I will not try it upon you."

He hesitated, and then smiled mischievously to himself. "But perhaps he can give you a more convincing one; and one which, in your

present position, you ought certainly to pass upon for yourself, Mrs. Varris. Oh, Mr. Dunneston!" he called, and committed himself before he could think again. "Mr. Dunneston!"

CHAPTER V

THE WARNING AND A DARE

THE Englishman came up cautiously. But when Preston had presented him to Mrs. Varris, he seemed to dismiss or, at least, postpone further consideration of whatever had disturbed him. The four entered together into the great cathedral. The service for which the Englishman had come was about to begin, and would be over within an hour. But young Preston sighed hopelessly as they went down the long, late-Norman nave to the famous Octagon of Ely; and as he again estimated the great transepts and the carved panels of the choir, he knew it would be long after noon and well toward tea-time before he could hope to have Miss Varris to himself again.

It was later than that, indeed,— for he had forgotten the obligation of bridge, — before he could speak alone to the girl once more. But at last he lured her a little away from the others; and she was looking up at him and laughing to tease him just a little.

"Plotting?"

"Probably the most dastardly and desperate enterprise ever conceived by an American — in a cathedral town."

"What, just now?"

Young Preston shrugged himself up delightfully in the sense of the girl's near presence with him, and her still unfailing understanding of his moods.

The sun had long set over the red and gray glowing towers of the militant Ely; and even the long, long hours of the English twilight were gone; and the Americans had been driven in to the inevitable bridge.

Without, where the smooth, silver moon rose above the high embattled towers and turrets of the mighty church, the soft evening

shadows fell aslant upon the dry, cool fields and the fens. Between the willows beyond, as they rustled and stirred with the night breeze, the river slipped shimmering by and seemed to wink and beckon, as the glint from the leaves winked, too, for those shut up in the inn to come out.

But the Americans within only drew closer together and bent more eagerly over their cards.

Young Preston and the girl, who had been playing together, had finished the obligatory game early; and as Mrs. Varris counted the score with the Englishman, who played the fourth hand, the two young people went over and stood in the wide, high window opening upon the lawn.

"Cathedrals by day, and bridge by night. Look at 'em!" Young Preston turned and indicated the crowded tables eloquently. With four women about each board — and sometimes one or two looking on — the tables stretched from the lounge through the parlors, and one, where husbands were playing, invaded

even the smoking room. "Ought n't they to be robbed to prevent them?"

"Yes; even robbed!" the girl had to agree honestly as she followed his glance about. "But I hope you were not plotting *that* then!" she laughed. "Not against mother, at least!"

"Oh, no; not just at that moment, Miss Varris," he reassured. "I was considering something far more furious than that. I was planning to write a book about them — and the cathedral towns!"

"What? After what you have said about the books already written?"

"Yes, Miss Varris," he replied sadly. "When I view this havoc of American homes which those books have wrought, and see how impossible it is to cure the victims even with the most skilful and persistent robbery, I am driven to the extreme of being willing to fight books on the cathedral towns with books. If I do, and I am spared the strength to give any conception of the truth of things going on in these towns, the prevailing passion for

foreign ecclesiastical architecture will receive a shock in more than one trusting home. But come, Miss Varris, they are through with the score there."

"And adding in the hundred for the last rubber," Mrs. Varris was saying as the young people returned, "gives us — on points and honors both — just two hundred and fifty-two points ahead, Mr. Dunneston. Not too uneven, and very good bridge!" she nodded in congratulation to her partner as she arose. "Thank you very much!"

She turned then to another table. The girl, too, glanced away for a moment.

"That 's ten shillings, sixpence?" Preston murmured in a low whisper to the Englishman, and settled his losings covertly.

He nodded, as the girl turned suddenly and caught them.

"You two have been playing against each other for money!" she reproved, in a cautious whisper.

"Only ha'penny points, please, Miss Var-

ris!" Preston begged. "I did n't mean that you should know; and I don't ordinarily play that way. Just to-night," he pleaded aside to her, "I wanted to for a special object, truly."

"What was it?" the girl demanded.

The Englishman, holding Preston's coins in his hand, had bowed and arisen.

"Watch him, Miss Varris!" Preston cried. "This was the purpose — to test his true belief in me. See! If he puts those coins into his pocket, he believes — in spite of what he appears to have heard to-day — that I am not the thief. But if he drops them into the box for indignant clergymen there before him now, he must suspect me. This is the test."

"I see," the girl nodded, as the Englishman stood a fraction of a meditative instant before the alms box and then let the little metal pieces slip into the slot.

"And so!" Preston sank back. "I can't tell you what a fall that is for me. Yesterday, Miss Varris, after seven long days of carefully cultivating the confidence of an Englishman

who can trace the gout in his family in an unbroken succession of bandages back for five hundred years, I had persuaded him that he could properly keep my money after winning it from me; and to-night — you have seen."

"He has n't said a suspicious word against you to mother!" the girl encouraged. "He said something to me; but both this morning and this afternoon he had every possible chance to — expose you to mother. And he did n't."

"That 's true," Preston agreed. "Of course, I was present most of the time. Still, I can't conceive his being reluctant to discuss me merely because I was present. But," he suggested with an inspiration, "although he must have expected you to warn your mother, don't you think we owe her a last chance of being directly informed about me before night? See; he is talking with her now. If you come out into the garden for a moment — "

The girl signalled her mother as she glanced about and, receiving permission, followed the young American out into the soft radiance of

the lawn. They went on to where the grass gave way to the walled walks and flowering beds; and between the high box hedges upon either side of them the steady moonlight fell obliquely, putting first one and then the other of the young people in the dark shadow, as they turned back and forth. And as he watched from the dark in which he was then hidden, Preston saw the girl's face soften unconsciously and become strangely serious and gentle in the silver light. And his lips, as he tried to open them, seemed to stick tightly together and the light banter of the moment before became inane and foolish.

As he watched her silently, she seemed to be unconscious of his scrutiny; but suddenly she stopped, before they had come to the end of the walk, as if to seek refuge in the shadow before her turn. As he himself had to come into the light then, Preston held the other word he had formed to say till he might have again the protection of the hedge shade. But when at last they turned, they both kept silence

so long that it began to assume a meaning which forced him to speak.

"You are going on to Lincoln to-morrow morning?" he asked.

"Yes; why?"

"It 's funny, is n't it," he considered, "but all the time I have been looking for you I never once thought about what I should do after finding you. I guess," he explained to himself, as the girl made no comment, "that just the chance of finding you seemed so 'impossibly good' that I could not think beyond that."

"And now?" the girl asked.

"After a few hours you are going away again. And — it is not permitted to search after people a second time, after once finding them."

"Why do you not come with us to Lincoln then?" the girl asked, a little puzzled. "Mother asked you, did she not?"

"Yes; but — what were you and Mr. Dunneston arguing about this afternoon when

you stopped so suddenly as I came up?" he demanded.

"Do you want to know?"

"Please."

"Well then — frankly — the impropriety, if not the — the — "

"Danger?"

"Yes — the danger of — of taking up with and — "

"And trusting?"

"And trusting persons whom one cannot — sufficiently know."

"I thought that was it. And you were disagreeing — "

"About what constitutes sufficient knowledge of a person, and the methods in which such sufficient knowledge can be gained."

"Yes. Now, I know Mr. Dunneston's ideas on those subjects; but what position did you take, Miss Varris?" the American asked directly.

"About what constitutes sufficient and proper knowledge of one?"

"Yes."

"Well — I said the most proper and sufficient impressions which a girl can have to — to — "

"To protect her! I understand. Please go on."

"Must be and should be those which, with a reasonable opportunity of knowing and judging a man, she forms for herself."

"And Mr. Dunneston did not agree? He thought it necessary, did he not, that one person's family should be known to the other's for at least a few hundred years?"

"Well," the girl smiled, "he seemed to think that preferable — but not exactly necessary."

"But he did think it absolutely essential for proper protection that before a girl permits a man to see much of her, she should know from some — some responsible friend of both, the manner of man he may be?"

"Yes. He was unyielding on that point."

"All of unyielding, I guess. Well — and when you told him that you had merely met

me on the boat; that I was an entire stranger before you found me in the next place at the dining table, what did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No; he—" the girl had come to the end of the walk and if she turned about, as they had been turning, she would be brought again into the light. So she stopped and, with her back to the high hedge, halted in its deeper shadow.

"He—what?" young Preston demanded gently.

"He did not believe that we knew you only from the boat."

"But I told him so, when I presented him to you this morning."

"No," the girl corrected gently; "you said only that mother and you and I had crossed together."

"You are right," Preston admitted. "So he thought that we must have been friends before. I see."

He drew in his breath sharply. He had been standing in the light; but as he spoke now, he drew in under the protection of the high box and hid himself in the dark beside her. The girl had broken off a little green twig from the hedge; and she bent it about her slender fingers as she waited.

"So he considers it incredible, Miss Varris," Preston continued in a low voice, "that I should have claimed you as friends and forced myself upon you, as he has seen, with no other right than a dining- and bridge-table acquaintance across the Atlantic."

"No," the girl corrected fairly. "I think he formed his opinion quite as much from mother and me as from you. It would be foolish for me to deny that both mother and I have felt, and have not been afraid to show, far more — confidence in you, Mr. Preston," the girl raised her fair little face frankly, "than we usually would in one."

"Oh, I surely appreciate that, Miss Varris!"

"But he thought I was just trying to joke

with him — especially after I told him that mother had invited you to travel with us for a few days as long as our ways lay together."

"What did he say to that?"

The girl laughed a little. "Oh, he told me with most excruciating seriousness all about your certainly *very* extraordinary coincidental connection with every crime in every cathedral town which has been reported; and besides, he described some certainly *very* remarkable and suspicious actions in the towns, preceding the robberies."

"And then?" Preston persisted.

"Oh, he —" the girl checked herself.

"Pointed out how uncomfortable and, perhaps, compromising it might be for you to continue to show the friendliness for me which you have. Did n't he, now?" Preston demanded.

"Yes," the girl admitted.

"I thought so! And, knowing something about the English constitution, I can't hold it against him. For, without discussing now the

possibility of my being this circuitous cathedral town thief, he warned you of a real danger from me."

"And now what do you mean?" the girl asked, checking the lighter tone of the moment before.

"I mean, Miss Varris," the young American returned, as gravely, "that, though I was laughing about it this morning, and was joking only a moment ago in there before the others, seriously now, there is almost every circumstantial reason and many other contributing bits of evidence besides, to indicate to the police, *convincingly,* that I am the thief travelling about robbing the Americans in these cathedral towns.

"Wait, please!" he checked her gently as she laughed lightly at him and started to speak. "You know, the police only this morning ferreted out the true significance of the cathedral crimes as a series. To check up their new theory, they have wired to all the other towns where the robberies have occurred for

the names of the Americans registered in the inns and the hotels at the time of the robberies. I understand that in a conclusive number of cases they have found that I have been in the towns just prior to the hotel robberies of the Americans; and also, in a few instances, my search about the hotels and inns where Americans stop and where the robberies occurred, has been remembered and communicated to the police here. There is no other American now in Ely, or here yesterday, who is mentioned even once from any of the other towns. Indeed, no other American man at all is reported as moving about from one town to the other along with the robberies. In short, Miss Varris," he concluded, "I might reasonably be arrested and held for examination to-night. But as the police do not know I realize that I am suspected, they prefer to leave me alone and watch me for a while."

The girl beside him seemed to have waited, with forced patience, for him to finish.

"Excuse me, Mr. Preston," she said then,

" but, you know, when we first came out here a moment ago, you began asking me about our plans and about going on to Lincoln to-morrow morning. Then suddenly you went off into this. I don't understand, quite. What has this to do with what you were saying at first? "

" About my going on to Lincoln with you? "

" Yes."

" Miss Varris, it shows why I must not go on with you to-morrow. I need not say how hard it has been to convince myself of that."

" You must not — why? "

" Because I must agree with Mr. Dunneston that it is impossible for a man in my present position to expect or permit your confidence, however fine about it you both may be, when you can know nothing of me from any responsible person. I was laughing this morning, Miss Varris, at the English caution in this matter. But by some sort of poetic justice the right of their way has been brought home to me directly. So I must not go on with

you to-morrow — when I would rather do that than anything I ever wished to do!"

He waited, and pulled at the twigs in the hedge nervously. The girl made no reply. She seemed to know that he had not yet entirely delivered himself and she watched him, studying with satisfaction his figure in the dark.

"But though I can't go with you to-morrow," he said grimly, "I shall find you again and go on then — if I may! Mrs. Thorne, whom your mother mentioned this morning," he explained, "is one of my mother's best friends; and she is responsible enough to satisfy even Mr. Dunneston, I think. She is in Paris, now, or somewhere on the Continent, and the letter I wrote and mailed to her just before dinner should reach her within two days, at most. I have asked her to write you or your mother, Miss Varris. So when I find you again, may I accept your invitation?"

He had moved out as he spoke and stood now in the moonlight, and though the girl saw

how serious and intent were his features, she laughed softly.

"Let me have things just a moment now, Mr. Preston," she said, as he turned aside, disappointed at her laughter.

"What?"

"Well, first; if I now had that letter from Mrs. Thorne, you would feel, of course, that you could go on with us?"

"Yes; I think so."

"Now, how could the letter give us such knowledge of you that we would be safer than we now are in trusting you?"

"Well — well —" Preston stammered.

"How many times have you seen Mrs. Thorne or, rather, has she seen you?"

"Oh, I can't say. I used to go to dances at her house; and a dinner party once. And of course I have called."

"With your mother?"

"To tell the truth that is the way mother usually got me there."

"Precisely. Now, just for the fun of it,

let 's sum up the knowledge of you which this eminently responsible Mrs. Thorne could furnish us. Of course, she would write most complimentarily and reassuringly. But in essentials all she could say would be, 'I know Mr. Preston's mother. He himself has invariably been polite to people at my dinners and he dances decidedly well; and, moreover, my dear, he is one of those almost unique men who pay party calls.' Come now," she laughed, "the only real knowledge which she could give us of you — to absolutely satisfy Mr. Dunneston and you, too — would be just about as vital as that, would n't it?"

"Yes," Preston had to admit reluctantly, but not without appreciation. "That would really be about it."

"Now understand, Mr. Preston," the girl warned teasingly, "since for some reason or other you so clearly do not wish to go on with us to-morrow, I am not urging you for yourself. But Mr. Dunneston gave me a sort of dare this afternoon, which I took."

"A sort of dare?"

"Yes; to try out my trustful American way, which he was condemning and I upholding. I told him that I considered what a girl can determine for herself, with any sort of opportunity, to be a great deal more sufficient than the usual introduction and formal commendation which every one trusts. And he urged me to try what he calls my 'American' way with you and see how I would come out with it."

"And you said?"

"I would. I am really sorry that I shall not have an opportunity now. He was most delightfully — exasperating!"

"Mr. Dunneston?" the American repeated absently. "Is n't he?" He stood thinking an instant more and then moved back beside the girl against the hedge.

"You consider," he said at length, "what you and your mother could judge of me during the week I was with you almost constantly upon the *Britannia* enough to jus-

tify me in going with you to-morrow to Lincoln?"

"I said," the girl replied, "that I certainly consider it far more sufficient than anything Mrs. Thorne could tell us — which would have sent you with us with a light heart."

"But you don't *know* of me even that I know Mrs. Thorne, or that I have written her."

The girl laughed lightly again.

"Really, Mr. Preston," she mocked, "if it were n't that Mr. Dunneston has put me on my mettle and committed me to proving myself right, I would now doubt you myself, almost."

"Tell me this, Miss Varris," the American said, "suppose that this night other Americans were robbed here in Ely — to make the test stronger, suppose you yourselves, whom I alone know to be carrying a good deal of money, were robbed in this inn to-night — would you be willing to have me go on with you to-morrow and travel with you?"

THE WARNING AND A DARE

The girl pushed out into the centre of the walk without answering, and glanced down the narrow way to the inn door.

"Come!" she said. "There is mother waiting for me in the doorway."

"Answer me first — please!"

"No; come with me first!"

"Mother," she said, as they came up together, "Mr. Dunneston has warned you?"

The elder woman laughed easily. "Yes. But, though it is so absurd, Mr. Preston," she said, "I *am* going to take precautions to-night."

"What are you going to do, mother?" the girl asked.

"I have n't fully decided. But we all have been asked by the management to send our valuables down in lock-boxes to the safe. I think I shall do it."

"Good!" the girl commended. She turned suddenly to Preston. "To make the test strong as you can, Mr. Preston," she nodded, "take — I mean, get the thief to take our

box; and we 'll answer you to-morrow morning! Good-night!"

"You *do* seem to have doubts yourself, don't you? But good-night!" he cried, as he squeezed the ends of her fingers. "Good-night, Mrs. Varris! Good-night!"

CHAPTER VI

ROBBERY AGAIN — WITH A SAFE CONDUCT

SOMETHING startled young Preston awake eight hours later. He had not followed to his room when the girl left him late the night before. He had waited about in the smoking-room with the men; and, even after that, he had delayed before retiring, so that he knew something must have awakened him, though he heard nothing as he sat up in bed.

The horizontal rays of the morning sun streamed in through his open windows, but they had not moved about far enough to strike his pillow. Besides, he thought some soft sound had aroused him; but he was a little confused. He had slept very soundly and had been dreaming; so he found it difficult to separate the real from the fancied in the first moment of consciousness.

His dreams had the inconvenient habit of carrying him in his sleep through the last thing suggested to him; so he could seldom say, at once, exactly how many of the incidents dancing through his brain belonged to reality and would remain his responsible acts, and how many would efface themselves and vanish into the mere film of a dream.

He was quite certain that the girl had challenged him to follow and take their lock-box, if he could. He was quite certain, also, that he had gone in and made sure that Mrs. Varris did, indeed, take a lock-box to her room. But his brain balked at the next act in sequence. Well, he considered with himself, if he really did that and the following ones, he must have the packet in proof. It was put under the rug in the corner. He could decide that easily by getting up. But — he lay back drowsily again, when the gentle but nervous knock at his door, which had first startled him, brought him back wide awake.

"What is it?" he called.

He could hear some one passing heavily down the hall; but neither was his call answered nor the knock repeated.

He sat up, still listening intently, until, when the heavy tread was gone, he heard again the distinctly agitated tap at his door. He sprang to open it then; and, as he peered out, he recognized the little English maid whom Mrs. Varris had engaged at Southampton and who had been travelling with her since.

As Preston started back in his surprise, she glanced quickly up and down the now empty hall and thrust a note toward him hurriedly.

"The Miss told me not to be seen," she murmured, and was gone.

"The Miss?" Preston repeated foolishly, staring stupidly at the note he found in his hand.

He closed the door quickly and, as the envelope was not addressed, he tore it open at once and read the few lines in Miss Varris's writing — her writing, which he saw now for the first time.

"Dear Mr. Preston," the note ran. "Please come to our sitting-room as soon as possible. It is very important that you come at once, before you see or speak to any one.

"If any one comes to speak with you or question you, please put him off, and tell no one anything till you have seen us. I can only explain this to you personally, and at the earliest possible moment.

"Very sincerely,

"ETHEL D. VARRIS."

But even as the young American was rereading the perplexing note, he began to get an explanation. There was again an imperative tread in the hall and this time a heavy knock at the door. Opening it, he found himself face to face with a sour-visaged officer of the law whom, after some small parley, he managed to put off with a promise to appear at the hotel office within a quarter hour.

Preston dressed very quickly then; and, hastening at once and unobserved to Mrs. Varris's private sitting-room upon the second

floor, he found both the mother and daughter awaiting him within.

As he entered, the maid who had opened the door fastened it quickly again and slipped into one of the other rooms.

Both the women were clearly very much agitated, though they tried to conceal it. As Preston entered, Mrs. Varris nodded to him pleasantly from the writing table, where she was figuring; but the daughter arose and extended her hand to him.

"You have seen — you have said nothing to any one, as we asked?" she questioned, gently releasing her fingers from his absently unconscious grasp.

"A police officer came to my room just after I received your note, Miss Varris," Preston replied. "But I put him off. But what — what is the matter, Miss Varris — Mrs. Varris?" he turned from one to the other.

"You have not heard?" the girl asked.

"What?"

"That we have been robbed?"

"Robbed? Last night? Of what?"

"Last night. Of everything."

"Of everything?"

"Of all we put into the lock-box to be sent to the safe."

"Oh! How?"

"Sit down, dear, won't you?" The elder woman arose and took her daughter's hand. "And you too, Mr. Preston. Thank you," she acknowledged, as the girl seated herself and Preston also threw himself nervously into a chair, though it was only to rise again at once.

"You remember," the girl began, "that we told you — that is," she substituted, "we had one of the iron lock-boxes they put into safes sent to our rooms last night. We were to put our money and things into it and lock it, and then ring the bell to have the office send for it and keep it in the safe for us until morning."

"Yes," Preston acknowledged, "I remember. Well?"

The girl started to go on, but seemed to reject the first wording which occurred to her.

"We did not tell the proprietor that we would surely send it down to his safe, Mr. Preston," — Mrs. Varris took it up then for the girl, as she watched her kindly. "We were to ring if we decided to send it down. He had given many of us safe-boxes for our personal things. He did not know that I had a good deal of currency besides."

"I know," Preston nodded again. "Only I knew that."

"No, Mr. Preston," the older woman corrected fairly, "many other persons in Ely must have known that I carried a good deal in funds because I tried in town to change it yesterday, you remember."

"Well; at any rate — "

"Just after we came to our rooms, Mr. Preston," the girl took the statement again as the mother hesitated, "we put the money and all our other things into the box. We locked it and rang the bell. Then —

"We had started to take off some of our things when some one — we supposed, of course, he was from the office, for we had just rung, and he asked at once for the box — knocked at the door. I handed the box out to him through the crack of the door without seeing him well — in fact, without seeing him at all, as the hall was entirely dark. And then, when we sent for our things this morning, we discovered that — that — "

"We discovered this morning, Mr. Preston," Mrs. Varris took it up again quietly, as she placed her hand reassuringly over her daughter's "that the bell wire — it runs exposed just along the moulding in the hall — had been cut just outside our door, so that the office could never have received our signal at all. The hall lights had been tampered with so that they would not burn, and — "

"And in short," young Preston carried it on himself, "some one who knew both that you were carrying a good deal in funds and that you would probably send the box to the office

— the thief," he substituted directly, "merely had to cut the bell-wires, wreck the lighting switch, and take the box from your door?"

"Yes. That is it!"

"I see now, Mrs. Varris," he comprehended, addressing the mother, though he spoke to the girl. "So therefore you sent for me before I could be arrested to give me a chance to — "

"*Please* wait a moment more, Mr. Preston," the girl checked him. "You have not heard quite all."

"When we asked for the box from the office this morning, and the proprietor discovered the method by which we had been robbed, he immediately communicated with the police. The officers came and examined us. They first asked us whom we had told of our carrying the money as we did. We had, truthfully, to name you."

"Of course."

"They asked, then, to whom we had mentioned our intention of sending the box to the office. Again we had to name you."

"Certainly."

"We did not think seriously, Mr. Preston," the girl protested quickly, "that they had really been watching and suspecting you upon the evidence of which you spoke yesterday. But they wished us to sign the papers, containing our statement as they made it out, upon which they were to arrest you."

"Were to?"

"For we refused, of course."

"Thank you," the young American acknowledged. "So you sent this," he indicated the note in his fingers, "to give me an opportunity to settle it with you privately, before the officers would have to arrest me —"

"Mr. Preston," the girl's tone came now as a rebuke, "we sent for you so that when they consult and advise with you as our friend, you will understand what we think of the matter and how you can best help us."

"As your friend, Miss Varris? Best help you?" he repeated.

"Yes; when they asked us to sign the

papers upon which they wished to arrest you, we referred them to you, and told them that we wished them to consult you, as you would act for us in the matter."

"I act for you?"

"We had no time to ask if you would, Mr. Preston," Mrs. Varris answered for her daughter. "When I saw the very great injury I had unconsciously done in taking you into my confidence yesterday, and then naming you to the police this morning in reply to their questions, I thought it the only thing to do to protect you and undo the wrong I had done you."

"But, Mrs. Varris," young Preston inquired, "did they not question you about me?"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"I said that you are an American friend who had come to England with us, but that you had not been able to join us until yesterday, and that now you were going on with us — at our wish."

"You said that to protect me?"

"Yes; and because we hope that you will do so."

"Then you are going on as you had planned?"

"Fortunately, Mr. Preston," Mrs. Varris explained, "I had given Elsie, the maid, ten pounds to settle the hotel account last night, and she has enough left to take us to Lincoln, where we have a banking connection which will furnish us with funds upon cabled instructions from America. We have decided to take the nine o'clock train directly to Lincoln. As I just said, we hope that you will accompany us after going through with the necessary police formalities."

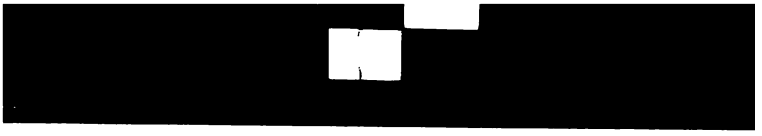
"I am sure," the girl went on, "that father will wish us to keep on with our original plans for the rest of the summer. And, as mother says, Mr. Preston, we hope you will travel with us for a few days to give us some opportunity of righting the wrong we did you this morning."

"In other words, you mean, Miss Varris," young Preston corrected, "that unless I go on with you and act according to the impression you were good enough to give the police for my protection — the impression that I am an old friend, long enough known by you to be trusted unquestioningly — I must be arrested. Without questioning me at all yourselves, you are offering me a safe conduct through the police lines with you — although there is every reasonable presumption that I am the man who has robbed you."

"Without understanding what we were doing," Miss Varris answered, "we directly implicated you with the robbery last night, Mr. Preston. We are offering 'safe conduct,' as you call it, only through those police lines which we ourselves drew about you."

"Yes; but —" the young American was considering, when there was a knock at the door.

A servant brought in word that Mrs. Varris and her daughter were desired at the office as soon as convenient.



"At once!" the elder woman replied. "You will come with us, Mr. Preston?"

The American followed, and mechanically glanced over and approved the papers which he and Mrs. Varris and her daughter signed.

"I say, Miss Varris!" he heard Mr. Dunneston's voice greeting the girl as they moved away, "I say, but I knew, rather, that you were merely trying to worry me a bit yesterday. I knew, rather, you had met Mr. Preston before, — what?" he triumphed soberly. "And I say, Mr. Preston!" he offered his hand in frank apology to the young American. "I say, really, if Miss Varris here had n't quite made me fancy she had merely met you upon the boat, I would not have connected you with these bobry burglaries a moment further. But really, you know, she quite convinced me of it, for a bit. So naturally enough, I say, was n't it, I thought you might be doing the robbing?"

"Quite naturally, of course, Mr. Dunneston," Preston cut short the Englishman's congratulation grimly.

He turned to the girl, still smiling grimly, and directed her glance with his own about the studying, stolid circle of official Britons.

"I 'm afraid I 'd forgotten the British nature, Miss Varris — Mrs. Varris," he murmured, "when I was so recklessly reluctant to go on with you; but Mr. Dunneston has kindly recalled it to me. So if it 's not too late, I 'll accept your convoy and safe conduct into Lincolnshire."

"Good!" they approved gladly.

Yet two hours later, as the shrill whistle of the little hurrying English locomotive shrieked for the first little station over the county borders in Lincolnshire, Preston surprised them by rising suddenly and pulling down his hand luggage from the racks over his head.

For two hours their talk had been carefully light and impersonal. But now the girl started quickly.

"You are not going on to Lincoln with us?" she asked. "I thought you said you were."

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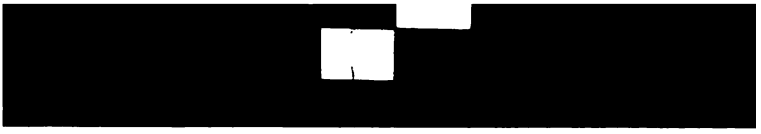


"I said into Lincolnshire only, Miss Varris," young Preston amended. "Considering all elements, I thought I might be permitted to take your convoy out of Cambridgeshire, and your safe conduct into this county. But did you think that even I could let myself go further?"

He turned and, taking off his glove, gave his hand first to Mrs. Varris and then grasped the girl's fingers impulsively before she could form her reply.

"Good-bye!" he said simply.

The girl seemed to be waiting.

"Oh, during these past two hours, Miss Varris," he cried, "I 've thought out a thousand things to say to try to thank you and show — my — appreciation of you — of what you have done. But the only word I can say now, the only one which can mean that I have even consideration for you, is 'Good-bye!'"

The train slowed and stopped. Preston opened the carriage door quickly, jumped down, and, removing his hat, stood uncovered as the

engine shrieked again and bore the women swiftly away.

"Good-bye!" they waved from the window as they left the little English country platform with the vines and flowers about it, and the young American standing in the sun watching after them.

CHAPTER VII

CHALLENGED!

WHEN they had quite vanished, Preston shrugged himself up and tried to consider his situation coolly. Mrs. Varris's action toward him that morning made him fairly sure that the Ely police, at least, would not press their suspicions of him further. So he told himself that he was no worse off now than he had expected to be when he started to amuse himself for the summer alone in England. But, since starting, he had gained more than he was willing to let go again without a struggle.

After their eight days together upon the *Britannia* he was aware, of course, that he had made himself far more than a mere travelling acquaintance to both Ethel Varris and her mother; and he was fully conscious that Ethel had become to him, even in that short time,

far more than a mere friend. It thrilled him hotly to appreciate more fully, now, how her unwavering trust in him that morning against all appearances proved her frank friendship for him beyond question.

He *could not* lose that again, he cried to himself. He looked defiantly down the track which had taken her away from him; but, even if there were another train, he knew he could not follow. He laughed hopelessly at the queer complications of comedy and tragedy in his adventurous position. Why, he could not even rejoin Mr. Dunneston, now, without a more adequate explanation of himself than he could furnish.

He looked up the track. A train, bound for Warwick, puffed into view. Making a sudden determination, he wired hastily to Ely for them to send his luggage after him, and took the train for Warwick. And for twenty days, then, he toured the interior of England alone, avoiding the cathedral towns as carefully as he had kept to them before. So, for twenty

days, he saw no more either of Mrs. Varris and her daughter or of Mr. Dunneston. But late in August, as the travellers were working their ways slowly to the ports to take ship back to America, Preston found them all at Plymouth.

The very next morning after his arrival the Englishman entered the breakfast-room of his same hotel upon the Hoe.

To Americans, Plymouth is the place where the first Pilgrims put in with the *Mayflower,* and where they last prayed and provisioned before setting sail for the New England of the West. But to the English it had been the stronghold and the principal port of their south-west coast for hundreds of years before. They fortified it first in the fourteenth century; and the great, frowning citadel of 1670 still stands and covers the most prominent point on the shore. But the forts of to-day are not conspicuous. They girdle the harbor behind low, outlying banks, built to conceal the mighty, modern mortars and the great disappearing

rifles which succeed the old tiers of threatening guns as guardians of Plymouth.

The whole city rises irregularly upon the three points reaching out into the sound and stretches four thousand yards from the Cattewater to the Devonport dockyards. But Plymouth proper holds to the little peninsula directly opposite the entrance of the sound to the sea; and the heart of this peninsula is the Hoe.

Sloping steeply from the sea-front, the Hoe has been smoothed and made into a high, rounded mound, half park and half promenade. It commands a full view of the sound and looks directly over the breakwater at the entrance, toward the Eddystone light, fourteen miles out to sea.

So before the Hoe there pass in daily review the naval and mercantile fleets of Southwest Britain. Back and forth, as they pass in and out of the Hamoaze and the Devonport docks, steam the battle-ships, cruisers, scoutships, destroyers, and all the attendant ships of

the Plymouth division of the channel fleets. And merchant steamers from the West Indies, the Americas, Australia, the Cape, the Baltic, and the Mediterranean, constantly call and clear through the waters before the Hoe.

The Englishman entered the big, high-ceilinged breakfast-room of the hotel which overlooks this busy water-front, with the sense of complete satisfaction which can be attained only by a Briton who has finished his hereditary task.

His ancestral duty was done. He had visited in turn all of the twenty odd cathedrals in England which were standing when his acquisitive ancestor made his first penitential tour. He had the prosperous appearance of one who has entered upon his inheritance.

It was so late in the morning that the room was deserted, save for three or four tardy ones who sat lonely over their mid-morning meal at separate windows.

The Englishman glanced over these critically and was selecting a solitary table for him-

self, when young Preston lowered the newspaper which had hid him and prevented him from seeing the other.

"Why, Mr. Dunneston!" he cried in surprise.

"I say — Mr. Preston!" the Briton returned, with the same surprise, but with more cautious pleasure.

"Well?" the American began, almost impatiently, sitting back as the Englishman seated himself on the other side of the table and automatically ordered his morning sole, mutton-chop, and "bit of greens, you know." "Well, Mr. Dunneston, I certainly have missed you."

"I say, three weeks, is it not, since I 've seen you?" the Englishman returned cordially.

"A little over," the American corrected. "But they seem to have gone well with you, at least!"

"Oh, rather! But I say, so — so they have not gone well with you, Mr. Preston?"

"Oh — they have gone, at any rate," the

American evaded. "But you, Mr. Dunneston, you have completed your course at last?"

"Quite. I finished at Exeter two days back."

"And you have satisfied them?"

"Them? The barristers, you mean? Well, rather! But do you know," he continued with recollected indignation, "after I had finished with every blessed cathedral standing in England, and my barristers had wired me the complete satisfaction of the court and that I was properly entered into the entail, I say, do you know, that grubby cousin of mine — the baronet one I believe I mentioned once — "

"Yes," Preston urged on, "I remember. The one with the — title, not the gout!"

"Quite he! Well, the bobry fellow jolly well ran through his own money more than two hundred years ago, you know; and he 's done nothing but try after mine ever since. And I say, do you know, he claims to have discovered that our ancestor with the beastly conscience who started all this, went to wor-

ship in some church or other in Scotland which is nothing more now than a blessed rooky cairn; and, fancy, the fellow is trying to oblige me to relinquish my claim, or pray on that Scotch stone pile! And I say," he grieved righteously, "fancy, can you, one waiting in Scotland at this season for the rain to stop for a service!"

The American laughed in sympathy.

"Ah! And you, Mr. Preston," the Englishman asked again with reciprocal concern, "how have you been, I say; and what are you about now?"

"I came down here from Tavistock yesterday, Mr. Dunneston," the American replied, "thinking I could get a cabin for home; but I can't say exactly what I am about, now."

"What? From Tavistock — yesterday?" the Englishman inquired carefully.

"Yes; why?" Preston asked.

"Oh, nothing much, probably," the Briton put him off. "But tell me, what did you mean by not knowing what you 're about now?"

"I meant I could n't buy a berth in even a freight steamer for New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, or even for Canada, out of Plymouth for the next two weeks."

"Not within the fortnight?" the Englishman repeated, with disappointment. "Why, you know, after getting final word from my barristers and having the property right again, I more than half fancied I might go to America myself. Really, that was quite half my notion, too, in coming down here. And there is nothing for America within the fortnight?"

"You can sail for Rio de Janeiro at twelve o'clock to-night in the *Bahia,* the Brazilian mail steamer, which is loading down there now, if you want to, Mr. Dunneston," the American replied. "She has a cabin or two left. I spent yesterday afternoon with the shipping agents of all the lines trying to get a booking, and then looked over the shipping itself, and I found this chance for Rio Janeiro. But for any place in either America north of that, absolutely nothing."

"Have you tried Southampton, then?"

"No; but I shall next week if nothing more turns up here. You can nearly always pick up a released cabin at the last moment there."

"Yes. Quite so." The Englishman dismissed the matter. He looked absently down at the ships in the sound and then, recollecting himself, turned back to his young companion.

"Oh, I say, Mr. Preston," he recalled. "I quite forgot for a moment, but where are your American friends, Mrs. Varris and the really delightful Miss — Varris, was it not? They have not sailed for America already, I hope?"

Preston leaned over and applied himself suddenly to his cold chop, which he had neglected entirely after the Englishman had come. But he did not succeed in hiding the quick coloring of his face.

"They have not sailed yet, I believe," he said.

"Excellent! Then we shall see them soon!"

"I don't believe so."

"Ah, why not?" the Englishman exclaimed. "Where are they, Mr. Preston?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know, Mr. Preston?" He was frankly puzzled now. "I say — I — I beg your pardon — but — I say, astonishingly fine girl that, you know, Mr. Preston; and you know, I understood when I last saw you all at Ely that you were to travel together a bit, and I rather more than fancied that — but you have n't had a misunderstanding, surely, I hope?"

"Oh, no further one after Ely, Mr. Dunneston," the American answered. "I merely left them in Lincolnshire the same morning after you saw us. I have not seen them since."

"In Lincolnshire?" The Englishman's bewilderment increased steadily. "Just after you left Ely?"

"Yes."

"But I say, I understood — that is, they told us in Ely, and you gave us to understand, too, that you were to keep on with them."

"Well, I did not."

"And you say you have not seen them since?"

"No."

"Nor heard from them?"

The American brought himself up and gazed across wonderingly at his companion.

"No; since you wish to know, I have not heard from them, Mr. Dunneston," he said.

"A pardon, Mr. Preston! Ah! A pardon, please!" the Englishman apologized at once. "I say, I did not intend to pry into personals, really," he protested. "And really, you know," he continued, "if you see how I meant it, it was *not* personal after all," he argued.

"Not personal?"

"No," the Englishman replied easily, "because, I say, it was rather the public, or certainly the police, understanding of it, was n't it, that you were to travel with Mrs. and Miss Varris and keep on with them? That was how I had it, at least."

"The public — the police understanding, Mr.

Dunneston?" The American was now the questioner, bewildered in his turn.

"Precisely, Mr. Preston." The Dunneston descendant twisted the air earnestly where the ancestral mustache used to be. "Was n't that the understanding which freed you at Ely and let you keep on without — without even surveillance from the police? For you most certainly must recall that she assured us you were not a chance acquaintance, as they said at first, but had come over with them and met them at Ely purposely to travel a bit together, and that therefore you could n't be the one robbing them. Surely you see that was all that cleared you!"

"Of course."

"But you did not travel with them at all, after leaving Ely?" the Briton inquired again, almost outraged. "You merely went with them away from our local authorities and then — you separated?"

"Yes."

"But you continued in England?"

"Oh — that 's obvious, is n't it, Mr. Dunneston?" the American answered impatiently.

"But you did not continue about the cathedral towns?"

"No." The American smiled in spite of himself as he saw the Englishman frankly staring at him in slowly comprehending scrutiny and pondering over this puzzle.

"I sa–ay!" the Briton began cautiously, as he watched his clean-cut young companion carefully. "I say, no offence, Mr. Preston, or —"

"Or no inference! I understand. Go on, Mr. Dunneston!" The American regained a little of his old spirit as he saw the Englishman heavily marshal the fragments of his perplexity together.

"Exactly, Mr. Preston!" the Briton nodded. "I shan't ask you where you have been; but — but ah, just how coincidental have you continued to be, I might put it, Mr. Preston, with the — ah, remainder of the series of robberies in England these past three weeks? They started, you know, and kept to the cathedral

towns till you left us at Ely. They left the cathedral towns then, but began at once at Warwick, and since have continued about the towns in as clear a series as before — the last reported from Tavistock only yesterday."

"What, Mr. Dunneston?" The American started out of his chair, going pale in his surprise. "A robbery at Tavistock was reported yesterday? I haven't seen it in the papers!"

"The police appear to have held the report for a time," the Englishman explained, taking a paper from his pocket. "Only the later edition this morning gave it out."

"So that was why you asked a moment ago if I had just come down from Tavistock?" the American inquired. "And that set you to wondering, to put it mildly, how close I have been to the rest of those robberies between Warwick and Tavistock during these weeks since you've seen me?"

The Englishman evidently considered it unnecessary to answer.

"Well, Mr. Dunneston," the American volunteered, "you can see for yourself that, at least, I am not jailed yet!"

"But if you do not wish to be, Mr. Preston —"

The Englishman checked himself cautiously, as though examining his impulse, and then leaned forward again in a burst of confidence and friendship which surprised the American quite as much as it pleased him.

"But if you do not wish to be," he repeated, "I would not let any one else, who knew of the circumstances at Ely, know that you did not continue with your friends about the cathedral towns. Most especially now that you are here at Plymouth trying to return home."

"Thank you, Mr. Dunneston!" the American acknowledged. "But why especially now that I am at Plymouth?" he asked curiously.

"Because, sir, the police are expecting and looking for Mr. Manling here at Plymouth now."

"Manling? The cathedral thief, the — the extraordinarily coincidental one with me?"

"Precisely," the Englishman nodded. "The remarkable American thief who has followed his richer countrymen and women about England this summer, robbing them so audaciously."

"I had heard that the police had given him that name for convenience' sake."

"Rather," the Briton corrected, leaning forward in his almost admiring interest, "he gave himself that name. He has been growing more bold and more simple, too, with every robbery. At Ely, you recall, his series of hauls had already given him an identity with the police," he continued with the return of his old impersonal manner. "But not content with that, Mr. Preston, clearly he has busied himself with building up a personality.

"And he has chosen to create a fortunate one. For he is always simple, subtle — safe. As he has never bungled nor betrayed himself, so he has never injured any one per-

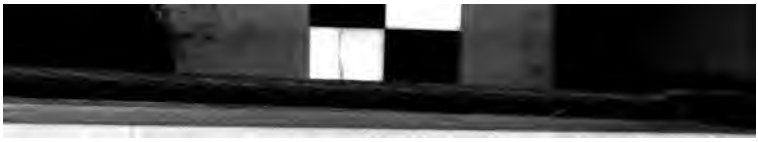
sonally. A month ago, you know, he even took to returning the more personal and intimate things he took in his hauls."

"Yes; I know," the American nodded. "He began by returning some things to the Varrises."

The Briton looked up quickly.

"I saw it in the papers, of course," Preston explained.

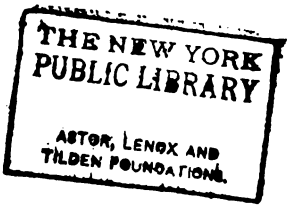
"Ah! Quite so! So of course you know the rest, but still let me say how I admire his audacity in sometimes even enclosing his apologies whenever he considered he had made an unfortunate haul. But these have been few. For as he has never disturbed any one who would not give him a good haul, I must say he seems never to have robbed any one whom his visit might even embarrass — more than temporarily. And always, Mr. Preston, with what advanced audacity! Really, I can scarcely tell you how I appreciated the way he went into the snorer at Stratford-on-Avon two days after the haul at Warwick. Fancy the fellow



entering the room and calmly helping himself to everything under the pillow and, when the man in the bed woke up, I say, think of Mr. Manling telling him that he had been rapping on the door for half an hour, and was finally forced to come in to stop the fellow from snoring, so he could sleep a bit. Why, they say — he had the fellow so apologetic for his bally snoring that he never suspected till morning that he was robbed at all. And then at Windermere where the American bounder he was robbing a bit stopped him from going through his clothes so that he had to take the garments and all with him. I say, rather rich that, the way Manling left them at the tailor's to be pressed and to be returned in the morning with the note to the bally bounder to really keep his clothes more decent."

The American watched his companion silently, not yet certain of his purpose, yet feeling somewhat more than vaguely that he, himself, was being excused, if not positively commended.

"The *Hibernia* relayed the message to us. An American, they say, six feet, tanned, dark hair and eyes, gray clothes" [*Page* 262]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"I fancy even our police must appreciate that," the Briton continued reflectively. "Certainly they must be more lenient with him, when they catch him, for the consistent care he has taken to avoid personal injuries. But really, I say, Mr. Preston," the Briton leaned over earnestly and confided in a lower tone, "I must admit that I admire the chap so for his audacity and cleverness that I 'd give him more than a chance to get clear from them, if he can. That 's why I 've told you what I just have, Mr. Preston," he whispered.

"You mean about the police?" Preston inquired.

"Yes; that they think he 's here at Plymouth, trying to get back to America."

"But you have not said what makes them think that."

"They have observed how, at first, the crimes kept to the cathedral towns. Then they left the cathedral cities, but still kept to the courses always crowded by rich Americans. But now even the most popular places are being deserted.

The Americans are making for the ports; the robberies follow them. From Tavistock Mr. Manling would probably make for Plymouth, for the travellers gathered here waiting for the ships for the States."

"But the police can only suppose this, Mr. Dunneston?" the American inquired. "They have no direct indication at all of this — Mr. Manling?"

"Precisely, Mr. Preston. Still, I believe that the special officer whom I passed in the hall a moment ago, Mr. Preston," the Englishman confided, "has already picked out his man from the circumstantial evidence of the continued coincidences against him. However, as the officer must appreciate that he can prove nothing directly if he arrests him now, I think he must be merely watching his man, hoping he will chance a last and bolder haul by which the police can catch him before he sails."

"In other words, you believe, Mr. Dunneston," the young American returned, impatient with the other's indirectness, "that he is here

watching me and waiting for me to try some 'last and bolder' thing so they can catch me at it. He believes that *I* am Manling?"

"I said to you a moment back, Mr. Preston," the Englishman replied guardedly, "that Mr. Manling — whoever he is — has so caught me with his coolness and audacity that I 'd more than half help him to get clear, if I could. So I shall warn you, since you ask it, that I believe this officer surely suspects you of being the man."

"For, of course, you are sure of it yourself now?" Preston demanded.

"At Ely, I confess, I feared it of you, Mr. Preston," the Briton replied. "But to-day at Plymouth I cannot help almost — hoping it, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Mr. Preston," the Englishman leaned toward his young companion earnestly, the Briton's love of a sporting proposition lighting his gray eyes, "that Mr. Manling has since shown himself so delightfully diverting

and clever and audacious, and he has invariably operated with such careful choice and consideration and has shown himself so decidedly exceptional and — exclusive a pilferer, that it — it would be rather a rare experience to tell, would n't it, that I 'd actually been travelling about with him? Of course, I realize jolly well that I should go out this moment and tell what I know to that chap in the hall who 's watching you in the King's name. But, I say, Mr. Preston, if you have additional audacity to actually attempt to-night and carry off a last, bold haul under the very noses of these police chaps, you can be sure they 'll get no help from me. You shall sail Scot free, as far as I can help you! Ah — wait, Mr. Preston!" he protested hastily, as he watched the American's expression. "I was not saying you *were* Mr. Manling. I was merely saying *if* you were and — "

"Of course you were n't saying that, Mr. Dunneston!" The American arose grimly. He turned away and stood looking down the Hoe to the busy shipping in the harbor; and, as

he stood there, at last a smile began to part his lips again. The Englishman sat gazing at him wonderingly, watching the inevitable turn to humor which things took with the American. Preston swung back to his companion.

"I know that you meant that in the kindest possible way, Mr. Dunneston," he mocked, smiling. "According to your nature, you *have* to believe that I am Mr. Manling and have been spending the summer in England robbing travellers to divert myself. Being forced, hereditarily, to believe that, why, you were really most generous in your offer to me a moment ago — and I mistook it!"

He turned back to the water-front below them and pointed out to it and the sound beyond.

"Look, Mr. Dunneston," he cried suddenly. "Tell me what do you think of when you see Plymouth Sound?"

"Why, only of Drake and the Armada, of course," the Englishman replied patiently. "Surely you know that Effingham brought his fleet here to wait for it; and here upon the

Hoe, directly before us, Drake was playing at bowls when they brought him the news that the Spanish were sighted. Surely one thinks of nothing else to compare with that when he thinks of Plymouth!"

"I'm afraid, Mr. Dunneston, there's a whole nation over there," young Preston pointed across the sea, "that thinks of Plymouth primarily as the port the *Mayflower* sailed from to help start the United States, three centuries ago.

"Up to that time, I guess, your people and mine, Mr. Dunneston, were probably pretty much the same — even as to their sense of humor. But now — it's funny, is n't it, how much difference just three centuries and the Atlantic Ocean make — to the sense of humor!"

He was turning away after that, when a boy came in from the hotel office and handed him a note.

"What's this?" Preston cried, with a hot surge of his blood. He recognized upon the

envelope the writing which had graven itself upon his mind from the note delivered to his room the morning at Ely.

"Dear Mr. Preston," — he read the few lines hurriedly, — "mother and I are stopping for a few days here at the Tudor in Plymouth. We have just heard that you are at the Grand.

"Both of us have been very much disturbed over the consequences to you — past and impending — of our most unfortunate trouble at Ely. Mother has asked me to write to ask you to come and see us before we leave. It will truly give us both much pleasure, as well as relieve us from the discomfort we have felt over the misunderstanding at Ely, if you will give us an opportunity to correct it before we sail for home.

"We shall be in after nine this evening, when we hope you can and will come.

"Very sincerely,

"ETHEL DAVIS VARRIS."

"Ah! Good news, I hope?" the Englishman ventured, as his young companion finished.

"Yes; oh — that is, just a line from two people whose ancestors also left in that little ship we were speaking of a moment ago — the *Mayflower*, you know — and who have since then been accumulating our American ways of considering — oh, thefts and things."

"Ah!" the Englishman comprehended astoundingly. "Ah — and you will not require a fourth for bridge to-night, Mr. Preston?"

"No; for we won't play bridge to-night, Mr. Dunneston!" the young American laughed happily. "That is, I *hope* we won't!"

CHAPTER VIII

A PREFERENCE FOR BLIND BELIEF

EXACTLY how he hoped to spend the precious hour after nine that evening, when he would see Miss Varris again, he could not say. But he was preparing for it long before the time to leave his hotel for the Tudor.

"I have always said," he reflected severely to himself, "that a healthy man should normally and naturally be careful of his appearance. But if he begins to be *cautious* of it — well, I begin to suspect him."

He smiled down tolerantly at the heap of evening ties he had tried in turn and discarded.

"And when he knows, by having haunted the Tudor Hotel for eight counted hours today, that it is a twelve minutes' walk from here at the most extravagant estimate, and, when he still has one whole, unelapsed hour

before him and can only fuss and fume — my suspicions increase. Well!"

He glanced apprehensively into the glass once more before he drew away. For the first time in his life he was unashamed to recognize that he was tall and well looking and that his features were undeniably straight and good, and his eyes and hair just dark enough to contrast distinctly well with the clean, summer tan which browned his face.

"But decently good looks, of themselves, can't count much with her," he recalled, sobering his first satisfaction immediately. "She is not in the least impressed with her own infinitely finer ones; she just takes them for granted. So why should mine count with her? And certainly because a man may be fairly tall and healthy and tanned is no infallible indication that he may not be — a pilferer!"

He sat considering something very gravely then for an instant. But in a moment he sprang up, chose his coat and stick carefully, and went out.

As he passed into the street, he stood and stared long in the direction of her hotel, then shrugging his covert coat closer about his shoulders, he took himself resolutely in the opposite direction. Yet it was still well before nine as his nervous step brought him around at last before the Tudor.

He recognized this and was turning about impatiently, when a carriage, which had passed him, stopped before one of the private entrances to the suites on the ground floor and two women alighted.

A maid opened the door and the elder woman went directly in, but the younger stopped and gazed for an uncertain instant down the street.

"Oh, mother!" Preston heard her call softly after the retreating figure. "Mr. Preston!"

"Mr. Preston!" Mrs. Varris returned at once to the door beside her daughter and welcomed the young American.

"Mrs. Varris! Miss Varris!" He colored consciously with his pleasure as he came in under their light. "You were dining out," he

charged guiltily, as they handed their cloaks to the maid who took his things also, "and I brought you back early!"

"But we were very glad to come back!" Mrs. Varris replied. "Indeed, we consider ourselves very fortunate in having this opportunity to see you again, for we are planning to leave to-morrow for Cornwall. And then in two weeks we sail for home. So it was most fortunate that we heard of your being here to-day, was it not?"

"Certainly, for me, Mrs. Varris," the young American affirmed fervently. "And I certainly am indebted to whoever told you."

The maid had closed the door behind them and disappeared; and, as they all sat down, Preston saw again the girl's peculiar and frankly amused smile.

"Are you, Mr. Preston?" she asked.

"I certainly am!"

"Then it was your friends — and followers, too, I presume I may say — the police!"

"The police?"

"They!"

"Well, no matter what that impends — to quote your note — I *am* grateful to them for this at any rate. But how did they come to tell you I was here?" he asked. "And how did you know they had been following me, Miss Varris?"

"Because they have been following us, too."

"*You?*"

"Yes; but only to try to trace you. We were unable to help them, but when they finally found where you were, they were good enough to let us know."

"Which was really most fortunate, Mr. Preston," Mrs. Varris repeated, "as indeed I should not have liked to leave England without knowing what were to be the consequences of that trouble we brought you into at Ely."

"But you brought me into no trouble, Mrs. Varris. As I told you that morning, I was already suspected."

"It is very good of you to say that, Mr. Preston; but you know, as we do, that before

we compromised you by taking you into our confidence and then directly naming you to the police as the one who might have robbed us, there was really nothing against you. So we must feel entirely responsible for the embarrassments to which, we know, you have since been subjected. And, unless you will allow us to help clear up the further difficulties which threaten you, we shall feel ourselves very much more to blame."

"But, Mrs. Varris —"

"Please, Mr. Preston, do not evade for our sakes. Really," she rebuked, "if you had not tried to spare us before from the results of our own action, and had gone on with us for a few days from Ely, as we wished, you would have saved yourself and us, too, a great deal of discomfort."

"Truly, Mrs. Varris, I am sorry; but I did not imagine —"

"Oh, ours was nothing, Mr. Preston! But you — tell me, have you not been seriously embarrassed many times in these last weeks?"

A PREFERENCE FOR BLIND BELIEF

"Well, Mrs. Varris," the young American smiled, "as I told Mr. Dunneston this morning when he asked me much the same thing, I have not been jailed yet."

"Mr. Dunneston? You saw him this morning?" the girl queried with interest. "So *he* is here in Plymouth, too?"

"Please, Ethel!" Mrs. Varris silenced the interruption. "But you cannot deny, Mr. Preston," she went on, "that you have been inconvenienced many times. And do you know, so far are the police at a loss for the real thief and committed to the absurd mistake concerning you which we led them into at Ely, that if you try to leave England now they probably *will* arrest and jail you?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Varris," the American tried to return lightly. "Mr. Dunneston warned me of that. In fact, he told me that they have not yet arrested me because they think, if they leave me alone a little longer, I will do something a little more bold and they can catch me, at last, with proof."

"That is what I understood, Mr. Preston; and, therefore, I sent for you at once."

"Why?"

"You are not to sail for home just yet?"

"No. I can get nothing either here or at Southampton for at least a week — possibly longer."

"Good! Then you will come with us down into Cornwall for the week you have still to stay here?"

"But, Mrs. Varris, you are only asking this because —"

"I am asking it because both I and Ethel shall be very glad to have you with us; because it will be a pleasure. And I ask it also because it gives us an opportunity to undo a part, at least, of the consequences of the trouble we have brought upon you — an opportunity which, I know, you cannot now feel that you must deny us."

She arose as she finished and offered a friendly hand.

"We leave on the Cornwall Express at nine

thirty in the morning, Mr. Preston," she added. "And I must write letters and do many more things before Elsie finishes packing to-night; so I know you will excuse me now. We will see you at the train?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Varris," the young American hesitated. "Thank you," he stammered. "Yes, you will see me at the train in the morning and — oh, I certainly will go with you, if I honestly can!"

She nodded cordially and slipped into the next room; and Preston, as he turned to the girl, did not reseat himself at once, but went over and stood at the window which opened upon the lawn, gazing out silently into the dark.

"You must think me very strange," he said slowly.

"No," the girl replied, as though she had been expecting it, "only very sensitive!"

"Very sensitive?"

"Yes. I knew you were, even before you showed it that evening — the last time we saw you."

"I'm not! And I didn't show it. But," he questioned inconsistently in a moment, "how did you know it?"

"Oh, most people who pretend to take things as lightly and as recklessly as you do are really very sensitive when one knows the truth. The manner they show to others is merely their necessary defence and their natural —"

"Perversion?"

"Oh, no! Compensation. They have to make it up to themselves —"

"And to the others?"

"Yes; and, Mr. Preston, when you give your sensible part an opportunity for a time, you much more than make up for the worry you give yourself and your friends from your sensitive side."

"Thank you. May I — hope from that that perhaps I could have worried you?"

"You did. Yes; if you want to *hope* it."

"I do — brazenly and all unashamed, if I could believe with it that I might ever make it up to you somehow."

"Oh, you have already — you do!" the girl assured. "For, of course, I did n't worry much about you," she hurried on at once. "I only worried about — well, Mr. Dunneston and the other English who, obviously, cannot appreciate either your natural way or —"

"Or its compensation?"

"Yes. It left you so defenceless among them."

"So that was the way I appeared to you?" Preston turned back to his window and gazed out. "That was why you stood by and did — what you did for me? I knew you could n't think much about me, of course; but I did n't think that I was to you just some one whom you felt you had to take up and care for — a defenceless Daniel in the British Lion's den!"

"Did n't you?" the girl laughed gayly. "Well, you were — just that! And now, Mr. Preston," she gathered herself up sternly, "please be serious a moment — oh, sensible, I meant, sensible! Serious means sensible to most people, but clearly not to you!"

"All right. I 'll try it. What is it?"

"Then tell me first, please, just for curiosity, what is it makes you prefer arrest here to going with us into Cornwall to-morrow?"

"That 's not fair, Miss Varris!" Preston had to smile in spite of himself. "You know that I would rather go with you to-morrow than do anything else I could choose. You know that —"

"I do!" the girl returned frankly. "Otherwise I would n't ask you why you do not come. But since I do believe that, why don't you come?"

"You know!"

"Because you consider it more necessary than ever that we should have word of you from some responsible person before it is right for us to trust you further?"

"Yes."

"Then if we had such word, you would not question your right to come with us — and escape the police?"

"Of course not."

A PREFERENCE FOR BLIND BELIEF

"Well, Mr. Preston, we have received that responsible word of you at last!"

"What 's that?"

"Yes; your letter finally caught Mrs. Thorne at Constantinople — she had left France — and she replied to mother. The letter came yesterday."

"Yesterday?" Preston found himself repeating dully. "Before you wrote your note to me?"

"Yes. But does that not satisfy you? Was not that the lacking essential?"

"Yes," he repeated weakly, feeling a queer sinking sensation of disappointment, which he knew the girl must notice.

"So *that*," he comprehended audibly, "was why you were willing to write me as you did, and could ask me to go to Cornwall with you?"

The girl laughed triumphantly.

"I thought you would think something like that, so I preserved the answer. Here is the letter," she took it from the table drawer. "Do you want to see it?"

"Thank you," he turned it mechanically in his hands. "Why! It has not been opened!"

The girl laughed again.

"No; of course not!"

"Of course not?"

"Hush!" the girl warned. "Mother was not expecting it. I did not tell her you had written for it. But I recognized the writing when it came and put it aside."

"But why?"

"Because I wanted to prove to you, if you came, that I was right in what I said to you that night at Ely. And you have just admitted it. Yes, you have!

"You remember I said that the essential facts between people are those which each judges of the other for herself. You pretended to think that the formal commendation of some responsible third person was more important. You pretended that, even a moment ago. But just now, when you supposed our invitation was the result of Mrs. Thorne's letter, you showed what you really thought

of a person who requires the opinion of another."

She took back the unopened envelope.

"Now," she tantalized, as she put the end of a paper-knife under the flap, "I shall do with this just as you prefer. Shall I open it or not?"

"Please don't," Preston replied humbly. "You were right," he acknowledged. "Confidence can't come from any one else — it must be only what one believes! And if you are willing to wish to keep it that, I wish it too!"

"I am willing!" the girl withdrew the blade from the flap. She took up a pen and wrote across the front of the envelope.

"Especially, Mr. Preston, since you told me Mr. Dunneston was in town with you."

"Why?"

"Because he rather dared me, as I told you, to try my ideas with you and see how I would come out. And getting knowledge this way would not be quite fair."

She handed the letter back to the young American.

"I have forwarded it home. Mrs. Thorne will think it missed us here; and mother can acknowledge it from home. Will you mail it when you go?"

"Thank you!" He put it in his pocket, and looked about for his things. But it was almost two hours later when he finally found them, and fully eleven when he left.

And then, as the girl followed him to the door, he recalled himself once more.

"By the way," he said, "you know Mr. Dunneston is quite worried as to whether or not it is his duty to lay all the facts he has gained about me before the police."

"Yes?" the girl asked.

"He really has a most damaging array, you know. But he has settled it with himself this way. He has promised that if I make one last and more daring attempt to-night and get away with it and the police can't catch me, he will let me sail free as far as he is concerned!"

"I hope you thanked him!"

"I did!" he touched her hand quickly again and started off. But something in that last contact seemed to keep his every sense and impulse so restless and enlivened that it was still another hour and more before his nervous energies were tired to a possibility of sleep.

But at last he made his way from the docks and deserted streets into which he had wandered, and climbed the Hoe to his hotel. And, as he turned to gaze out upon the sound, the lights of the Brazilian mail ship, which sailed at midnight, were far out beyond the harbor lamps and slowly disappearing beyond the black of the southern horizon.

CHAPTER IX

A LIBEL ON THE THIEF

He found Plymouth horrified the next morning.

"Murder! A murderous assault — by Manling!" The shock and astonishment of the English met the young American as he came down to the breakfast-room of his hotel upon the Hoe.

For Manling, whose eminently safe operations the police and public had followed with complacency — indeed, almost with admiration — had made the expected bolder and more audacious attempt. And heavier even than the sense of horror, there seemed to have fallen upon these strange English the pain of a betrayal, an outrage, and violation of their trust.

Even the staid *Morning News* seemed to share the general shame and chagrin of a

people who had trusted and been betrayed. Manling had fallen. The shock to the English was not only because another American visitor had been set upon, robbed, and probably murdered in the secure old Devonshire Inn at Plymouth, but because it was certain that Manling — upon whom the English depended to continue straight in his considerate course — had committed the crime.

It was irrefutable, as the paper spread out the evidence.

A rich American was missing — a broker named Hareston, who was known to have carried considerable funds in easily convertible form. His rooms at the Devonshire Inn had been entered in one of the simple Manling methods. That "Manling" himself had entered was certain, besides, from the identification of a small packet of things which the thief had dropped upon the floor, and which were known to have been part of the last Manling haul two days before.

But this time Mr. Manling had not got

away without being seen. And when caught, he had not halted at violence — perhaps even murder — to save himself.

The deep-stained marks of a struggle over the rugs and furnishings told their undeniable story — they and the disappearance of the victim.

Moreover, the signs were plain which showed where a body — whether living or dead no one might say — had been dragged out the window to the lawn and across that to the narrow little side street. So half the Plymouth police scoured the city for the victim; and the other half searched for the assailant.

Young Preston wondered, for an instant, why the police had not arrested him at once and why he was not then on his way to the jail.

But the *News* explained it clearly to him.

"This shocking outrage may at least, we hope," its account concluded, "serve the purpose of putting our police upon the proper track of the criminal at last. Obviously, it

explains why our officers have failed, as completely as they have to date, in obtaining any sort of positive evidence against the American whom, they tell us, they have been following for the past few weeks, thinking him the man who has called himself Manling.

"It is further an indication of how, forming a premature conclusion upon insufficient evidence, the police and public can mislead themselves and persist in following the fancy of their own creation.

"From every indication given, up to this shocking exposure, the man had been presumed to be a person of some apparent breeding, manner, and — one might almost say — refinement.

"So, from every characteristic hitherto shown, we had seemed secure in supposing that the man would do nothing worse than continue to pilfer, in some simple and safe manner, the surplus funds of such as showed him they could afford the loss.

"He had so completely misled even the

special officers detailed upon the case that, they tell us themselves, they have contented themselves with examining and shadowing for further and more conclusive evidence certain young Americans — or, to be more exact, a certain young American — against whom the coincidences of many circumstances seemed suspicious.

" But the true Manling, however it may have pleased and profited him heretofore to confuse himself with another, is now exposed in his proper colors as the ordinary, low, and brutal villain. Our police cannot too soon abandon their absurd persecution of those whom they have been holding under surveillance. Instead of being one of the gentle class pursuing this remarkable course in refined crime for some obscure purpose, the man is too clearly of the repulsive, cruel, criminal type which sticks at nothing. Our police should now put themselves upon the right track and bring this murderous assailant to justice."

So, as he put down the paper and passed into

the dining-room, the American comprehended why the plain-clothes officer, whom Mr. Dunneston had marked for him the day before, gave him only a cursory and, if anything, rather a commending glance. And he was prepared for his former friend's apologetic greeting, as he met Mr. Dunneston himself passing out.

"A pardon for a grave, a very grave error, Mr. Preston!" the Englishman requested soberly. "A pardon, please, Mr. Preston! But you must rather well agree," he excused himself, "that till this, things were jolly well against you, what?"

"But this?"

"Ah; this I can say safely, Mr. Preston, is not only entirely inconsistent without previous possible notion of you, sir; it is, indeed, quite prohibitive of it. Ah; quite conclusively prohibitive, I assure you!"

"I am glad this has satisfied even you, sir!" The American bowed his acknowledgment and went on to his table.

"Well!" he sighed to himself with satisfaction as he broke his eggs. "If even Mr. Dunneston and the police are reassured about me now, I certainly have n't much of an excuse to take Mrs. Varris's protection into Cornwall. But if even the English are sure about me now, I won't need an excuse to go!"

He looked at his watch impatiently. It was still more than an hour before he could hope to meet the Varrises. So after finishing breakfast, he had to wait restlessly about the hotel. But at last he went down to the railroad station where the Cornwall Express was waiting.

"Mr. Preston!" the Varrises greeted him from their reserved compartment as we went out to the train. "We are very glad! You will put your things in here?"

"It was a terrible thing. I am told that the police have found no trace of Mr. Hareston yet," Mrs. Varris closed the few comments upon the night's crime a moment later. "But if there must be some favorable feature for some one in everything, let us be glad that this

has shown the police the absurdity of their mistake, and you, also, your absurdity, Mr. Preston, in supposing that we could connect you seriously with the thefts."

"Oh, I am not ungrateful for that, Mrs. Varris, especially since not only the ordinary English, but even Mr. Dunneston also, has acquitted me."

"You say even he has acquitted you?" The girl turned from her examination of the people passing upon the platform.

"Yes; I saw him this morning, and he was awfully decent about it. And by the way, did I tell you that he, too, is going down into Cornwall, and may take this train?"

"You did n't. But I knew it."

"He —"

"No; I saw him pass just a moment ago. And there he is now, reading the paper he just bought. There — see! And — touch wood, Mr. Preston!" she laughed. "Touch wood quickly! You just finished saying that he had acquitted you, but if I recall his foreboding

expression at all correctly, that is certainly it which he — "

"Is wearing now? Yes; it certainly is, now that he sees me. But I wonder what has made him suspicious of me again so quickly? Truly he was all right a few moments ago."

"It must be in the newspaper — the second edition which he just bought. Oh, please call him over, Mr. Preston!"

"Oh — gladly!" the American assented, "since I can't seem to satisfy you except when writhing under suspicions. I guess," he turned and regarded the Englishman a moment, "if Mr. Dunneston can half substantiate that expression of his with the facts, I 'm going to make you very happy soon, Miss Varris. Anyhow, here goes! Oh, Mr. Dunneston!" he called obediently, as the Englishman at last folded his paper and began to search along the first-class carriages for a seat. "Mr. Dunneston!"

"Ah, Mr. Preston!" the Englishman returned with a manner subdued and foreboding,

even for him. "And — ah, Mrs. Varris and Miss Varris!" he altered suddenly to greet the women. "But — ah," he turned back queerly to the young American, "you are — ah, travelling again with Mrs. Varris, Mr. Preston?"

"There is no one else in here, Mr. Dunneston," Mrs. Varris said cordially, "and as the train is already starting, won't you come in here with us? We shall be very glad to have you. You, too, are bound for Cornwall?"

"Thanks. Ah — yes," he answered, resigning himself to his seat as he scrambled in and the train gained speed. "I am, ah — very fortunate, Mrs. Varris! Mr. Preston indicated that you were in town yesterday; but I did not know that he was to travel with you again — after — ah, the event of last night."

"But why not, Mr. Dunneston?" the girl demanded, smiling expectantly at the young American. The Englishman settled back and regarded her seriously. "Why, Mr. Preston

has just been telling us that even you could not connect him with *murder!*" she added.

"No," the Englishman replied. "But — ah — you have not heard, I see," he comprehended. "Ah — I understand now. You had not heard. It is not murder!"

"Nor — murderous assault?"

"Nor even murderous assault, Miss Varris. No; nor anything else but another cleverer, bolder, and more adroit robbery in which the thief had exercised his greatest care to prevent the violence which was feared. In short, it is nothing in the least inconsistent with or at all prohibitive of our holding our — our original ideas of the personality and identity of the remarkable Mr. Manling! For this last crime does not prove him an unbred, brutal ruffian, but only a more scrupulous and clever operator!"

"What 's that, Mr. Dunneston?" Young Preston leaned forward quickly, as the others fell back before the Briton's quiet assurance. "What do you mean, sir?"

The Cornwall Express had already cleared

Plymouth, and, as the Englishman looked out the window at his side, the wheels roared over the great iron spans of Royal Albert bridge and the Tamar, which holds Devonshire off from Cornwall, glistening below in the morning sun.

The Briton waited patiently till the train rushed again over the silent, solid ground, and the bright copses and spinneys of the extreme county of Southern England flashed by.

"I mean, Mr. Preston," he said then, "that Mr. Manling has not only claimed the credit of the crime last night for himself, but also —"

"But also, Mr. Dunneston?"

"But also this time, Mr. Preston, he has at last overreached himself."

"Overreached himself?"

"Oh, only apparently, perhaps!" the Englishman qualified cautiously. "Apparently only, I must say; for I have thought that he had overreached himself many times before and he had not. But now it seems certain that

the police must surely have him within the next hour. For last night in Plymouth, as we know, he committed the bolder and more audacious crime for which the police were waiting; and we must admit he threw us all completely off his track, at first. That seems to have made him so reckless that he evidently thought he could safely correct the police and put them back on the track again. But he dared the one thing too much! He has overreached himself at last! And we have him!"

"How?" the American put forth his hand for the Englishman's newspaper. "How, Mr. Dunneston?" he demanded.

"Here it is!"

"This must be it, Mrs. Varris," Preston said quietly, as he glanced quickly down the column conspicuously headlined "LATER":—

"'The following remarkable communication, being concerned with the outrage of last night upon which we have commented above, has just been received by the police and the *News* in duplicate. The police inform us that the writ-

ing and other characteristics are identical with those of the other communications received previously from the man who signs himself Manling. This was mailed in Plymouth early this morning. The communication, verbatim, follows:

" ' " To the Police, Press, and Public: —

" ' " As I have consistently taken the greatest pains," ' the letter reads, ' " and have repeatedly subjected myself to great personal inconvenience as well as often permitted myself to suffer substantial losses to protect the persons and to preserve the respect and confidence of my chosen clientele, I am exceedingly pained and grieved in observing the stupid, insulting, and libellous manner in which the press and police have interpreted my visit at the Devonshire Inn last night.

" ' " Irrespective of my personal sensibility, I feel that I owe to those whom I hope from time to time to add to my clientele, that they should not feel the entirely unnecessary and

unwarranted alarm over my visits which these stupid and libellous reports, if left uncorrected, would cause them to suffer.

"'"Therefore, I wish to state — and this statement can be verified at the end of two weeks when S.S. *Bahia* reaches Rio de Janeiro, for which port she sailed with Mr. Hareston from Plymouth at midnight last night — that I neither committed a murder nor made a murderous assault upon Mr. Hareston at the Devonshire Inn.

"'"In fact, if I had appreciated that he had been drinking heavily and was very drunk when he disturbed me during my visit, I would gladly have retired quietly, as I have done more than once before when anything involved a personal contact, however harmless. But he himself prevented that by a direct attack upon me. However, I took such care of him even after he had grappled with me, that I even permitted myself to be slightly hurt to save him a more serious wound. So the stains which appear to have alarmed and misled the

police are from a slight cut which he inflicted upon me, not from any hurt to him.

"'"And after I had quieted him, I would have been glad to have been able to leave him in his rooms; but he had thoughtlessly turned on the lights before attacking me, and so made it impossible for me to leave him where he could give my description to the police in the morning.

"'"But, although I was obliged to remove him, I never for a moment considered the cruel and clumsy way which seems to have occurred to the police. Instead, I took him with me as carefully as though he were just a tipsy friend, and put him aboard the *Bahia*, where I insured him the best care by explaining to the stewards that he was a rich American planter in Brazil. I even bought him a private cabin at a price which considerably cut into my profits for the evening, and saw him comfortably in bed and carefully restrained there by the steward before I left him and — the ship sailed for Brazil.

"'"For the two weeks until this statement of the circumstances can be confirmed by cable, I ask the indulgence of the public.

"'"Faithfully,

"'"MANLING."'"

The women looked from one to the other. Preston turned and glanced out the window and considered the flying green fields and the trim, clipped, and ordered farms of Cornwall, bright and clean under the late August sun.

"I can see how this restores Mr. Manling's original character," he said finally. "But, Mr. Dunneston, I cannot see yet where he has overreached himself — in that character. Of course, he has declared himself a little more plainly and given the police more than he has dared to give before. Yet, even if this statement is true and not sent to mislead the police, I cannot see how they can catch him — inside of two weeks."

"You do not?"

"No. Where has he overreached himself at last? What has he overlooked?"

A LIBEL ON THE THIEF

"The one thing which alone can harm him; the one thing which alone can make it as if he had never placed Mr. Hareston with such great care and forethought aboard a slow fourteen-day boat for Brazil; the one thing which can bring back his description, and the evidence against him, and give it to the police as minutely and surely as though his victim were testifying before him in the dock! The one thing which gives him, not two weeks, but now less than one hour, to act and get under cover or find himself fast and secure in jail!"

"But what is that one thing, Mr. Dunneston?" the girl now bent forward brightly and demanded impatiently.

"Yes; what is that one thing he has forgotten?" the American repeated.

"What?" the Englishman echoed. "The 'wireless,' of course, Mr. Preston! The 'wireless'!"

CHAPTER X

"WIRELESS" — AND A WOUNDED WRIST

"THE 'wireless'!" the American exclaimed.

"The 'wireless'?" the women cried, puzzled.

"Quite!" the Englishman nodded, evidently pleased with the surprise which he had evoked. "For the *Bahia* carries a 'wireless' installation. Did you not know it, Mr. Preston?" he inquired.

"I did not. But if she does?"

"Then, well within an hour, sir, the Plymouth police, who are travelling in the coaches ahead in this same train, can be in complete communication with the *Bahia* and can take a statement and deposition from the last victim of the remarkable Mr. Manling as minutely and accurately as though Mr. Hareston were swearing the identification upon the Book against the prisoner in the dock. Very truly,

"WIRELESS"—A WOUNDED WRIST

Mr. Preston, the *Bahia* is far out of sight beyond Land's End this morning. She is indeed a slow ship, so that she cannot reach land again for at least two weeks, and, as she carries the mails, neither can she put back to England before then, or into any other port. But by the 'wireless,' sir, the *Bahia* will be 'in communication' for a few hundred miles yet and for at least twelve hours!"

"I see!" the American nodded.

"And I am almost sorry!" the Englishman continued with concern. "For Manling has been very bold and very clever and most diverting. But clever as he is, he is no cleverer than his most stupid oversight. He took the police dare to do one bolder and more audacious thing under their very noses; and he did it successfully!" he cried with real admiration. "And threw them at first completely off his track; but then he attempted the one thing too much which the police can always count upon to catch the cleverest man when he becomes over-confident.

"And had he, Mr. Preston, but seen or recalled the little vertical and horizontal wires of the 'wireless' aerials which hummed over his head as he was leaving the *Bahia* after paying the stupid steward to keep the drunk and violent American locked in his cabin, he could have got away even with this last taunt to our police; and he would have had his safe two weeks in which to leave England and seek cover. But as it is now, within half an hour the police in the second-class carriages ahead of us must have him!"

"In half an hour?"

"When we reach Polporru, Mr. Preston, where there is the first large land 'wireless' station upon the Cornish coast."

"Polporru upon the Cornish coast — where we are to stop?" the girl interrupted.

"Ah; you are to stop there, Mrs. Varris? And you, Mr. Preston?"

"We have stopped there for at least a few days every time we have come to England, Mr. Dunneston," the girl replied.

"WIRELESS" — A WOUNDED WRIST

"And the 'wireless' station which the police are to use is there?"

"Within twenty minutes, if we are on time," the Englishman pointed out the window at his side, "we should see the great mast of the new station on the hills to our left. The effective radius of the new station is, I understand, several hundred miles under all conditions, which gives the police still a comfortable margin before the *Bahia* can possibly pass out of communication.

"Had Mr. Manling been less confident of his cleverness, and been willing to wait before sending his impudent letter to the police, the *Bahia* might have passed beyond the radius giving her direct communication with the shore; and it would then be a rather doubtful and pretty business for her to send her messages from mid-ocean by relaying them from ship to ship to the shore.

"But as it is, the police need merely press the key at Polporru, call the *Bahia* somewhere a hundred miles off Land's End as simply as

they could call London by telegraph; and, when they have taken Mr. Manling's description, catch him and clap him into jail."

"That is so!" The American leaned back and considered the flying landscape a moment, but the girl bent brightly forward.

"I hate to be stupid, Mr. Dunneston," she said. "But the 'wireless' — I do not quite understand it yet."

"You mean its operation?"

"Of course, I knew we had a Marconi installation on the boat coming over this year, and I even sent and received messages. But I do not quite understand yet how the police will use it to get their information from the *Bahia*."

"It is not difficult to explain, Miss Varris. Doubtless you recall the sets of long wires which stretched up the foremast, and then horizontally from mast to mast of the vessel which brought you over? Those were the aerial wires of the ship's installation. As I said, we shall soon see upon our left the tall iron mast supporting the high, vertical aerials

of the Polporru land station. At the lower end of those wires — both upon the ship and upon shore — is a powerful sending apparatus which discharges a very powerful current into the wires, when the key is pressed, which is felt by every similar set of wires anywhere within a circle of some hundreds of miles. The effective radius for a ship's 'wireless' installation is seldom more than two or three hundred miles. A shore station sometimes sends much further than that, according to conditions. But at Polporru to-day the police are counting upon the ordinary communication radius of a couple of hundred miles. As the 'wireless' waves will spread out from Polporru in a ring in every direction, they know they must find the *Bahia* well within the circle of three hundred miles. They need not know where, exactly. Wherever she is, they can call and communicate with her as confidently as though they had strung a wire to her and were telegraphing over that.

"Indeed, the chief difference between 'wireless' communication and that with wires to

which we are all accustomed," the Englishman continued patiently, " is that the operator upon the wire can call only the stations upon the same wire, whereas the ' wireless ' operator, using the atmosphere as his signalling medium, can call and receive an answer from every station anywhere within his signalling distance. But as the call which the police will make in a few moments will be for the *Bahia,* the operator aboard her will at once recognize it, take down the police inquiry, and, pressing his own key, send his answer and — give us Mr. Manling! "

" Thank you. I see," the girl acknowledged, though it was evident she could not comprehend clearly. She turned to the window on her left. The flying train began to leave the inland fields which it had chosen, after crossing the Tamar, and started pressing again toward the sea-shore.

" Oh, there! " she cried, after all had waited a few moments in silent suspense. " There is the mast on that little hill by the town! Is not that it, Mr. Dunneston? "

" No," the Englishman decided, after gazing

at it. "That is the old Polporru station, I believe, Miss Varris, only occasionally used now for coast signalling work. The new station is — there, do you see it? Down below the town a little and nearer the shore?"

The train swung about another bend. A tall iron mast suddenly shot up from the sea in the direction the Englishman pointed.

"That is where the police are going," the American confirmed, as the train stopped and the platform of the little Cornish station filled with the men alighting from the carriages ahead.

"And not only the police! The whole town seems going there, too!" the girl commented as she looked about. "That old station is absolutely deserted, and even the town is emptied. Word must have gone ahead of what the police are to do. But come, mother; we stop here anyway, you know."

Young Preston jumped down quickly and began handing the things out to the waiting hotel porters.

"And you, Mr. Dunneston?"

"I *was* going on to Clovelly," the Englishman considered doubtfully. "But, I say, I 'll stay and see this through, too," he decided suddenly.

"Good!" Young Preston put his hand in through the window for the Englishman's luggage. As he extended his arm, his wrist stretched clear of his cuff and showed a white bandage bound tightly about it.

"I thought there was a bandage under your sleeve," the girl cried as she saw it. "So you were hurt! Is it very bad?" she sought to examine it.

"Please — it's nothing!" The American hastily drew back and covered his wrist with his sleeve again. "I was just cranking a motor for a fellow at the hotel after breakfast this morning — he was having some trouble and was in a hurry — and the handle flew about, after I let it go, and struck me. It just bruised me a little, and broke the skin so that it bled."

"WIRELESS" — A WOUNDED WRIST

The Englishman looked at the American critically.

"Not all of the officers have gone down to the station, Mr. Preston," he said. "Our friend of the Grand Hotel, who has been riding in the compartment just ahead of us, seems to be waiting about a bit."

"I see! The officer who has been shadowing me!"

The American gathered up his things experimentally and moved towards the hotel 'bus with the others. The officer immediately followed along behind.

"I 'm sorry, Mrs. Varris," young Preston stopped the others. "Of course I meant to go up with you and see you settled before doing anything else. But I hate to parade 'old faithful' here through the town after me. I clearly have re-established myself as a perpetual object of English suspicion. So you will excuse me to satisfy this man and clear myself before coming up with you?"

"I am sorry, sir," the man came forward

respectfully. "We had given up, sir, any idea that the man might be you, sir, till we received the astonishing communication published this morning, sir. And orders, sir, are to keep with you till we shall have heard from the *Bahia*. Sorry, sir," he repeated. "But orders —"

"I understand!" Preston smiled patiently. "I was n't trying to escape. As soon as I saw my friends settled, I was intending to go down to the station myself and let you compare me with your description of Mr. Manling to your fullest satisfaction. I certainly hope you will get it with complete details. I 'm much more anxious to have it than any of you can possibly be. So lead on, and I 'll go with you now!"

"Thank you, sir!" the man acknowledged. "It would save me trouble, sir. I 'm glad you offered it. I was to ask you to step down. But I 'm afraid, sir, that there must be a bit of a wait."

"Why?"

"Because we have ascertained, sir, that Mr. Hareston was indeed very drunk and in very bad shape last night, sir. If, then, you — I mean Mr. Manling, sir, had him locked up in the cabin as he says, he would probably sleep very heavy and very late, sir, so he would not naturally wake and call the shore station till rather late."

"Yes; but can't you call the *Bahia* and get them to wake the man up?"

"We can, sir; and we are probably doing that down there now. But we have found out from her owners that, though the *Bahia* carries 'wireless' for protection, she has no regular operator. The freight clerk operates when needed."

"I see."

"Yes, sir; he would be very busy with other things after leaving port; we hardly hope to have him much before noon."

'I'll go down there with you now, anyway," the American decided. He turned to the other three.

"I am sure Mr. Dunneston will see you settled, Mrs. Varris," he said. "I don't care to parade my police detail to the hotel. Besides, now that I am all but clear of this business, you understand that I want to have it done with?"

"Certainly!" the mother nodded. But the daughter had turned and stood gazing down at the crowd collecting about the little house of the 'wireless' station on the shore.

"Then you are going down at once, Mr. Preston?"

"Yes."

"Will you take me with you?" she asked suddenly.

"You want to go?" he cried.

"Don't you want me to?"

"Want you to? Of course; but—" He checked his objection and turned to Mrs. Varris for her to decide.

"Mother, do you see any reason why I should n't go?" the girl appealed to her, too.

"Of course not, my child, if Mr. Preston

wishes to take you," Mrs. Varris returned, smiling. "I was thinking myself, Mr. Preston," she turned to their young friend, "that Ethel and I ought to go down there with you before going to the hotel — it seems so like deserting you to let you go and face those English alone, although the message from the *Bahia* can only clear you. But since this man thinks there may be a long delay, perhaps I had better go to the inn first. Yet if Ethel wishes to go now, I certainly see no objection."

"Thank you, Mrs. Varris!" young Preston acknowledged warmly, without daring to glance at the girl.

"You 'll bring her back to me at once and come and tell me who the real Manling is, as soon as you 're clear, won't you?" Mrs. Varris added.

She held out her hand and received Preston's grasp. The Englishman, too, extended his hand clumsily before he followed her to the 'bus.

"And, I say, really I hope you can come up

and tell us about it, Mr. Preston. Good luck, old chap! Really, I say, good luck!" he repeated heartily.

"That was fine of him, was n't it?" Preston mused as he watched the two drive off in the 'bus. "I believe the fine old sport truly likes me and hopes this can clear me — though he can't honestly see it that way.

"But this is so much finer of you, Miss Varris!" he recollected the girl at his side, guiltily. "After the way you have been standing up for me against everything, I wanted above all to have you there when this thing clears me; but I did n't dare think you would care about coming."

"Yes, you did!" The girl met his eyes just a fraction of a second. But before he could reply, she was leading ahead coolly.

"We 're keeping our escort waiting, Mr. Preston," she said. And in another moment the police officer caught step to converse with them cheerily.

The high steel mast, which bore the hum-

Something made her apprehensive and kept her from sensing the pages she turned as she tried to read

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

ming aerials of the " wireless " apparatus, was fastened firm into the bed rock of a steep white cliff, cutting a little cape out from the rugged Cornish coast; and the little stone station, which housed the batteries and coils of the sending and receiving apparatus, stood even closer to the edge of the cliff at whose base the white breakers from the end of the English Channel were beating against the boulders.

A cool, fresh breeze was blowing in from the Atlantic, and before it a fleet of Brixham trawlers, all speckled and splashed with the flying spray, coasted cautiously toward Plymouth, while two eight-knot tramps, outward bound, beat out into the channel on a long slant. A three-funnelled cruiser, far from shore, was blowing great puffs of steam up under its smoke to assure a double-reefed schooner that it intended to pass to starboard. But neither Preston nor the girl could see, from that high little point piercing the sea, any sign of another ship, or even a shred of smoke which might be from the *Bahia*.

Yet the Plymouth police, just ahead, stepped confidently into the little stone " wireless " station. When they pressed the key within, they knew that they could send their message to the *Bahia,* though she were three times as far beyond the reach of the sharpest eye; and they knew that the answering discharge of the *Bahia's* spark could bridge that distance twice over.

The villagers of Polporru, though they must have been long used to the wonders of " wireless," pressed up close behind the police and crowded about the entrance of the little building.

The man, escorting Preston and the girl, opened a path through them with difficulty, and the two young Americans entered the station.

As they came in, they heard the heavy hiss and rasp of the powerful sending spark, leaping across the spark gap and on up the aerials to send out its signal swiftly in the direction of the fleeing *Bahia.*

"WIRELESS"—A WOUNDED WRIST

"Cras–ssh! Ash! Ash! Asssh!" the spark roared, as the door closed behind the young Americans and shut out the crowd once more.

This signalling continued steadily and without response for some moments. One of the Plymouth police inspectors, who had taken his place quietly beside young Preston and the girl, explained the delay.

There was no doubt that the *Bahia* was still within signalling distance, he said; for another ship, far out at sea and bound for Southampton, had heard the call and volunteered that she had passed the *Bahia* barely half an hour before and that she must still be well within communication.

The freight-clerk operator was obviously busy with his other duties; but he would soon answer. And indeed, after the very next series of signals from his key, the man who had been calling the *Bahia* stopped his current, stooped suddenly, and clamped the receivers of his recording apparatus over his ears.

"The *Bahia* is acknowledging, sir!"

"Then send this!" The police inspector in charge handed the operator his carefully written message.

The rapid volleying of the sending spark hissed itself out. And in the silence of the succeeding suspense, the American drew in beside the inspector, who bent intently over the operator, listening, with his receivers fastened over his ears.

The operator, as he received, wrote out his transcript upon the pad before him, and the inspector tore off the sheets and read them to himself.

"What are they saying?" the American demanded suddenly.

"The *Bahia,* sir," the inspector replied sternly, "is confirming the story given us by Mr. Manling himself in his statement mailed us this morning."

"That is?"

"They are saying, in response to our query, that, just before clearing the dock last night, a man, very drunk, was brought on board by

some one. The man who brought him on board bought a cabin for Rio de Janeiro and put the drunken man into it. He told the steward that the other man was an American coffee planter who, when drunk, was subject to delirium and hallucinations. He paid the steward liberally to quiet him and silence him so that he would be allowed to sail. He promised the steward also that the man's brother, who would meet this man at the dock at Rio de Janeiro, would reward him further for any care he would give. The steward reports that, after some hours of wild struggles and protests, he finally got the man to sleep."

"Good for the steward!" The American could not suppress his appreciation as he looked down at the girl beside him.

The officer drew up sternly, and even the girl shook her head.

"This confirms by detail the general story received this morning, sir!" the inspector commented coldly.

"Yes; and now?"

"The captain and first officer have sent for the man — Mr. Hareston, as we know. They are now taking his statement."

The inspector and all waited till the operator, at the bidding of the scarcely perceptible taps and ticks in his receiver, wrote a full page of the pad. The inspector tore it off and examined it carefully.

"And that is his statement?" the American inquired.

"It confirms, as you may see for yourself, sir," the inspector obligingly handed it over, "the main points of the robbery and following shanghai-ing of the deponent as communicated to us this morning by Mr. Manling, sir."

"I see," the American only glanced through it hurriedly. "But the description of the man?" he asked, as the operator began to write again. "How does he describe the man?" he hastened.

The inspector read over the operator's shoulder.

"Ah!" he exclaimed with gratification. "This is very good!"

"What?"

"I was doubtful of the absolute reliability of the description of the criminal, even if we could secure a statement from Mr. Hareston. Considering the confessed condition of the witness at the time of the robbery and attack, I was afraid that his statement could not hold conclusively. But, of course, the steward, with whom he bargained, had a most excellent chance of observing the man, and the purser also remembers him."

"Yes, and they say — they say?"

"Fortunately," the inspector continued. The operator had finished the sheet and the inspector tore it off and held it before him. "Fortunately the statements and descriptions of all three exactly agree. I think there can be no doubt of this; this is final."

"What is it, then?"

"The man who made the attack and put Mr. Hareston aboard shortly before twelve,

when the *Bahia* sailed," the inspector read triumphantly, as his men, at a gesture, closed closer about the American, "was an American dressed in evening clothes, with a silk hat, a covert coat, and a stick! He is tall — probably a trifle over six feet — and well built. His features are regular and distinct. He might be called handsome. His hair and eyes are a very deep brown. He is tanned and — and — "

"Yes — and?" The American caught himself up strongly and defiantly under the direct, inevasive eyes of the officers. "And?" he mocked. "I know that the man is very like me! I have been mistaken for him — he has had me mistaken for him many times before! But — and what? What more distinctive thing can they name to identify this man with *me?*"

"Hold out your right arm, sir!"

The inspector himself slipped up the sleeve an inch or more.

"And, sir!" he concluded finally, "Mr. Hareston states, under oath, that in the strug-

gle he distinctly recalls that his assailant cut himself, or somehow was cut, upon the right wrist. He says the bleeding from that stained his clothes. The steward and the purser both swear also that the man who put Mr. Hareston aboard the *Bahia* had his right wrist newly bandaged with a handkerchief!"

The American felt his head drooping, and, as the officer still grasped his arm and held its wound in clear view of all, he stared dully, dazedly, stupidly down at the white bandage about his wrist.

But suddenly another hand — a quiet, firm, steadying little hand, whose touch brought him up quickly, alert and ashamed, to his senses, and brought with it, too, a thrill of something so strange and unexampled that it ran through him with a great recklessness of everything for that moment — that hand touched his bandaged wrist and recovered it, simply and unresistingly, from the heavy grasp of the officer.

"Miss Varris!" he cried then, recovering

himself, "you are not going to make this more — painful for me!"

"I think, sir," the inspector said sternly, before the girl could form her reply, "that that last detail is, I may say, final!"

He turned then to the girl in his surprise at her action, and seemed to wait for her to explain herself.

"Oh, it is, Inspector, *final*, as you say! Yes; that is just it!" she cried joyfully. "That last detail was quite — final!"

"Then — " the inspector began deliberately.

"Then, Miss Varris — " the American cried pleadingly, "you will not — "

"Therefore, Inspector," the girl returned triumphantly, "I think I shall be able to prove to you, upon very conclusive evidence, that Mr. Preston could not have committed the crime at the Devonshire Inn last night!"

"Could not, madam?" the inspector demanded. "How, madam? Can you prove that he had not this hurt at twelve last night when the *Bahia* cleared?"

"I know that he did not have it, Inspector," the girl returned evenly, "when he left the Tudor Hotel in Plymouth, late last night, where he had been calling upon my mother and myself!"

"You can swear to that?"

"Yes, I can and will swear to that!" the girl replied. She turned quietly to Preston.

"You were not hurt then, were you?" she asserted rather than asked.

"No!" he managed to answer dazedly. "I was hurt, as I told you, this morning."

"And I will swear to that gladly, Inspector," she confirmed.

"Miss Varris! you shall not!" Preston started; but the inspector interrupted.

"Very good! But at what time can you prove he did leave the Tudor Hotel, Miss Varris?"

"I can prove, upon evidence which you cannot hesitate to accept, Inspector," the girl rejoined calmly, "not only that Mr. Preston could not have had time to rob and be hurt

between the time of his leaving us at the Tudor and the sailing of the *Bahia;* but I can prove satisfactorily, I think, that *he had not even left the Tudor till the Bahia had already sailed!*"

The American caught himself about, his sudden amazement startling him from his stupor.

"Miss Var—" he started again; but the girl looked up and caught his gaze, and for the second time she held him helpless before her strange, imperative appeal to him. He checked himself, wondering, and watched her silently. Again the officers appeared not to have noticed his exclamation.

"You appreciate, Miss Varris," the inspector warned gravely, "that it is not sufficient for you merely to state this; you must *prove* it."

"I appreciate that, Inspector."

She thought a moment and then looked about the group of the local authorities in the background which had given way to the Plymouth police.

"Barrows!" She suddenly singled out one of the Cornish officials.

One of the men stepped forward respectfully and removed his hat.

"I was fearing you had forgotten me, Miss Varris!" the man murmured.

"Not after the way you checked my horse that time when he started to bolt! I did not see you at first among the others. That was all."

"Thank you, Miss."

"You are the sheriff still for this part of Cornwall?"

"Yes, Miss. The deputy, Miss."

"You have known me and my mother for some time?"

"You, for full five years, Miss; and Mrs. Varris, sir," he turned to the Plymouth inspector, now comprehending the reason of his being called forward, "we all of us here in Polporru have known for full ten years. She has been coming every summer or so for full that time, sir, for a week or so to visit at Mr.

Brookingdale's — him of Buckingham, you know, who married an American lady, and has the big place above here on the hills."

"Precisely," the girl confirmed confidently. "Thank you, Barrows — very much!" she held out her little hand to the Cornishman's clumsy, delighted grasp. "As Sheriff Barrows says, Inspector," she continued then triumphantly to the Plymouth officer, "mother has been known here for at least ten years. She has often visited Mrs. Brookingdale; and always — even if we are just passing through — she has stopped, as she stopped this time, to see Mrs. Brookingdale for a few hours, at least.

"I shall not ask you to take my word alone that Mr. Preston could not have committed that crime. As mother was to send word to Mr. and Mrs. Brookingdale to let them know that she was in town, they are probably at the inn with her now. So if you will come with Mr. Preston and myself — and in such a way as to do Mr. Preston no further injury," she

concluded coolly, "we can prove upon my mother's evidence, for which Mr. Brookingdale will gladly hold himself responsible, that Mr. Preston did not leave our parlor at the Tudor last night till ten minutes after twelve, when, as you yourselves have said, the *Bahia* had already left her dock."

She turned to the American again, with her commanding, inevasive appeal, which he could only obey.

"Let us go now, Mr. Preston!" she said.

The inspector wavered.

"Men," he directed then, "until we can ascertain beyond all doubt whether or not this gentleman is the one we are after, make public none of the details we have gained this morning. If he is not the one, we must keep them to ourselves for our use until we have caught our man."

Then he followed the two young Americans as they made their way quietly through the inquiring, wondering crowd waiting outside. A part of the crowd started to follow as they

saw the police inspector accompany the Americans toward the town. But as most of the police loitered at the "wireless" station, the crowd turned back and still waited about the little stone house.

So young Preston and the girl and the inspector entered the sleepy little Cornish village alone. It was little more than a double row of pretty, picturesque stone and thatch shops and houses extending along both sides of the shady little street, unevenly paved with big, flat stones. But beyond the end of this street stood a newer and more pretentious building, put up to attract the travelling Americans who love Cornwall.

A big motor-car was standing before this inn. Ethel Varris recognized it with an exclamation of pleasure, and in a moment she saw her English friends with her mother in the morning-room of the inn.

The girl at once brought in young Preston and the police inspector and presented them to her mother's friends. Mr. Brookingdale stared

at the officer sternly. The inspector stood to one side, uncomfortably.

"And now, Ethel," Mrs. Varris exclaimed when the introductions were over, "what *has* happened and what *is* the matter?"

"A most stupid mistake has happened, mother, but nothing is the matter which you cannot correct in a moment, if you will. The inspector here, who came down from Plymouth with us on the train this morning, merely wants you to tell him what time Mr. Preston left us at the Tudor last night — to avoid another stupid mistake, mother!"

"Oh, that is all?" Mrs. Varris asked, much relieved. "I will be very glad to give that, or anything else which can help him clear his case. It was after twelve, Inspector, when Mr. Preston left — but then, he had come rather late."

"At what time he came is not material, madam." The inspector collected himself. "The time of his departure alone is the question — and essential. We know that he did

not return to his rooms at the Grand Hotel till after half-past twelve, and we know that the *Bahia* sailed sharp at twelve. If he had left as early as eleven, he must explain what he was doing between that hour and his return to the Grand Hotel at twelve-forty. But if he did not leave the Tudor till after twelve, obviously we are wasting our time in trying to trace him in this matter. So I wish to know only, madam, if you are certain that this young man did not leave your parlors at the Tudor Hotel till twelve o'clock or after."

"I am certain."

"May I ask, as is my duty, how you are certain?"

"Because, Inspector," Mrs. Varris replied patiently, "some little time before, I went into my own room, which was just next to our parlor and between that and my daughter's room.

"I was very tired and lay down in my room. When my daughter closed the outside door of our suite, after Mr. Preston had gone,

the noise woke me, and a moment later, as my daughter passed through, she turned on the light, and I remember distinctly commenting upon the time. It was ten minutes after twelve, was it not, Ethel?" She turned to the girl for confirmation.

"Yes; it was precisely ten minutes after twelve," the girl replied evenly, "when I came into your room."

Again young Preston started; but as he glanced about the others, he checked himself with an effort.

"That is quite sufficient, I fancy, is it not, Inspector?" Mr. Brookingdale put in.

"Quite, sir!" the officer bowed in respectful apology. "It is quite — quite incomprehensible still in some ways, I must say, sir," — the man looked about and moved out reluctantly, — "but we are glad to have ourselves set right about this young gentleman. We ask your pardon very sincerely, Mr. Preston." He bowed to the American and withdrew.

Young Preston returned the bow blankly

and turned, hopelessly, to try to join in the light talk which the others almost immediately resumed. That the girl was brightest and gayest of all and was clearly covering over his stupid replies only made the endless hour worse.

But at last the English left, and Mrs. Varris went out with them to their motor.

Preston faced the girl then with the agony and sudden weakening of a snapped strain.

"You knew it was scarcely eleven when I left you at the Tudor last night!" he charged.

"Of course!"

"Of course? But you — you —"

"I told the inspector," the girl seemed to defy him, "that I could show to his satisfaction that you did not leave till after twelve. And I did!"

"Yes; but your mother — you made your mother —"

"State just what she honestly thought. Wait a moment, *please*," the girl stopped him as he started to protest. "I myself said only

three things, all of them true. I said that I knew you were not hurt when you left me last night, and that I would swear that you did not get hurt till this morning. And I said that it was after twelve when I woke mother by going through her room. Now, I know that you left at eleven; but I *did not* fasten the outside door and pass through mother's room till a little after twelve. She did not know that you had not just left. I did not tell her."

"I see that she only told what she thought," Preston acknowledged. "But *you* knew I had at least an hour to do what was done in Plymouth last night between eleven and twelve. And you knew that I might have done it!"

"I knew!" the girl again defended him defiantly against himself, "that you could not possibly have done it! I knew it! I knew it even before the police put that in about your hurt wrist!" she cried. "I 'd know now that *you* could n't have done it, if I did n't have that to make me more sure!"

"My hurt wrist?" Preston demanded in wonder.

"Yes! But I tell you I did n't need that to make me know!" the girl repeated. "When they put that in as they did, of course it made me still surer that this 'wireless' was all part of the police plot against you. All summer they 've been trying to get the real thief, but they could n't, don't you see? So they have been persecuting you to save their own reputations. Why, don't you remember how they had to wait and wait there before getting an answer? I don't believe that they got an answer at all; but, when they saw they could get nothing from the *Bahia*, they just pretended they did and described you as you stood before them."

"No, they did n't, Miss Varris," Preston had to correct her, although his heart leaped into his throat at this girl's passionate defence of him. "They described me as I was last night — the clothes and all — not as they saw me then."

"Then how could they describe you with your wrist hurt, when you did n't hurt it till this morning after breakfast?"

"I don't know that! I don't know that!" Preston stammered, confused. "But how do *you* know my wrist was hurt this morning — and not last night in the fight with Hareston? You merely had my word for that!"

"No, I had n't!" the girl returned in triumph; "for I knew for myself that what you said was true. I saw you myself this morning when you hurt yourself helping the man with his motor."

"You did n't!" Preston cried incredulously.

"I did!" the girl confessed, coloring crimson. "For early this morning, after we were all packed up, I took Elsie out for a walk with me, and," she turned her face away for the first time, "I took her down the street toward the Hoe. You were pacing up and down in front of your hotel when the motor went wrong in the street beside you. I saw you spring out to fix it, and something fly up and

strike your wrist, and saw the blood come, and you stood and laughed 'All right' to the people in the car before bandaging it. I — I won't tell how close I came to letting you know then that I was there! But, when the police put that in their description against you, I was *sure* it was part of a plot. So, I saw my chance to best them at their own plot! And," she triumphed gladly again, "I did it!"

"Miss Varris! Oh — oh, Miss Varris!" young Preston could only exclaim, incredulously.

He felt the blood sting hotter and hotter within him. He put out his hand and caught one of the girl's and held his over hers for a fleeting instant, and then Mrs. Varris's quiet voice in the hall brought his senses back to him.

"But how can that give me the right to stay?" he cried, as he let go her hand. "If that could clear me, you could have told it to the police. But it could not! I can take advantage of your — your evasions for me,

to keep myself free. But I cannot stay with you with — without the truth."

"Do you suppose," the girl challenged, "that I could not account for your still staying up, after leaving me, without thinking you a thief?"

"No!" Preston cried. "For — oh, you said you, yourself, stayed up till after twelve, too! Could you understand me from that?"

But the girl now flushed deeper and bowed her head and did not answer.

Preston pulled himself together.

"But that only makes it more necessary for me to go till I can come back to you clear," he said hollowly. "So good-bye!" he cried. "It is only that I care so much to stay with you that again I can only say, Good-bye!"

He caught her hand once more. "Good-bye!" He crushed it between both his own, and was gone.

CHAPTER XI

UNDER THE WING OF THE WIRELESS

"LAND'S END!" the American pointed.

Far off to starboard the extreme point of Cornwall slid into the sea.

"We've lost the land now for six days!"

The Englishman smiled seriously, then indicated the long, vertical streaks strung from the masts overhead.

"Not for a few hundred miles yet!" he reminded. "The 'wireless'!" he almost exclaimed.

He watched the American carefully for a moment, as he turned sidewise to the ship's rail.

"For the 'wireless,' Mr. Preston," he continued warningly, "cannot only bring back to land and make available there evidence from a ship at sea, but it can also carry

from the shore to the ship any matter which may come up against any one on board.

"Formerly a man — even a criminal — could count upon at least a week's security if he could get safely to sea. But for all the freedom or refuge one can find now, even upon a transatlantic 'liner' — as you Americans say — in mid-ocean, one might quite as well be upon our Strand or your Broadway. For now you cannot shake a thing off, or escape it even for a week, though upon the high sea. The 'wireless' will send whatever there is to pursue you hot after you, and overtake you with it even in mid-Atlantic!"

The American pretended to shiver at the foreboding warning in the Briton's words, but he shook himself up again and smiled easily.

"Some of you English certainly have the most inveterately cheerful way of bringing out the gloom in things. You almost convinced me for a moment that I actually had come to sea to escape something which is now sure

to pursue and catch me anyhow! But let 's not recall anything like that!" He shrugged with a real, reminiscent shiver this time. "Let 's think that we are at sea again, and four hundred miles nearer America each day!"

He looked away from his companion and glanced expectantly and hopefully down the broad, bright promenade-deck, alive with the breeze and gayety of the first forenoon at sea.

Ahead, the tiny little green Isles of Scilly, speckled and splashed with the white, dashing surf from the mighty ocean now clear and open to the American shore, began to slip past in scattered successions. But at last the steadying ship shook off even those last lingering recollections of the land and breasted full and fair the breadth of the glistening Atlantic.

And, as forgetful as young Preston himself of the warning of the "wireless" aerials humming softly in the wind overhead, the other passengers began to settle themselves comfortably for their last, long delightful week at sea, secure from disturbance or interruption.

The American reviewed, with a share in their gay satisfaction, the fair serried Saxons and Angles — British and American — who passed and repassed him in their morning promenade.

He started forward!

"Miss Varris! Why — Miss Varris!" he cried in his delighted astonishment.

"Mr. Preston! Well — Prisoner!" The girl's familiar, teasing voice, after her first surprise, laughed at the young American behind the Englishman's back.

"Liberator!" young Preston found himself rejoining as naturally and easily, in the bantering tone of their old companionship into which the single amused, mocking word of the girl had at once re-admitted him. "Jove!" he cried joyfully, as he fully realized the meaning to him of her presence on board ship again in the easy spirit of their former friendship. "But it is impossibly good to believe that you are here! And really, Miss Varris, it is most alarming to me, and surely must be to Mr.

Dunneston, to find you here on board this ship full five days before you intended to sail. What has happened to send *you* here to sea — are you escaping something, which is going to follow and catch you anyhow?"

"Oh, Mr. Dunneston!" the girl cried, as she recognized then the Englishman behind young Preston. "So you, too, are on board!"

"Certainly, Mr. Preston," she turned back to the American, "I am glad now that I am on board. For, from what you have just said, the foreboding English disposition which so readily forces you to connect yourself with every crime you chance upon, seems to charm you still — in spite of leaving England. Just exactly what, please, was Mr. Dunneston suggesting to you now?"

"Oh, he was merely warning me about the 'wireless,' that was all, Miss Varris," the American reassured. "He was cautioning me against too premature exhilaration at leaving England. The 'wireless' obviously can keep

me in convenient touch with the Cornwall jails for a fully adequate time yet."

"I beg pardon," the Englishman corrected conservatively, not certain of how many of the younger people's words were meant seriously. "Mr. Preston was observing to me, with quite unjustifiable relief, surely, for one who left England in his extremely — ah — equivocal position, that we had quite entirely lost the land for the week. Whereas — "

"Yes, whereas the 'wireless,' Mr. Dunneston," the American interrupted impatiently, "as you very properly recalled, can bring a warrant for my arrest at any moment and keep the police very cosily in touch with me for a few hundred miles at least. And, as it has been decided over and over again in the courts that the deck of an English ship is English ground and, obviously, we still have the English with us, it still behooves me to be wary."

"It does indeed!" the girl nodded. "But, Mr. Dunneston — "

"I beg pardon." The Englishman checked

her seriously. "I beg pardon, Miss Varris," he repeated, after pondering a moment. "And, I say, I would not ask it, you know, but Mr. Preston is in the cabin with me, you know. He bought the other half just by chance, and, I say, I 'm glad to have him with me, of course. Jolly that, we two together, what? But I say, you know, when you came up a bit ago, Miss Varris, you addressed Mr. Preston as 'Prisoner.' I say, I hope he has n't been jailed a bit anywhere, has he? You were not seriously in jail, I hope, Mr. Preston?" he turned with concern to the young American.

"Oh, not tried, condemned, and in stripes — I mean in the funny arrow-marked suits your convicts wear, Mr. Dunneston," the girl corrected. "He was just arrested at Polporru that morning and detained a short time under suspicion."

"At Polporru?" the Englishman repeated. "You mean he was arrested," he exclaimed incredulously, "between the time I left you at the station and — and when I saw him off

myself two hours later when he was called away? I say, you know, the police were quite stuffy about their information received by the 'wireless' that morning; but you do not mean that Mr. Preston was arrested the forenoon upon that? Why, you did n't tell me so, Mr. Preston!" he rebuked.

"I ought to have told you, I know," the young American agreed guiltily, "particularly before being booked in the same cabin with you, and most particularly," he ran on recklessly, "as I would now be languishing in jail praying for adequate longevity to pay the English people the proper penalty for my twenty-six crimes, if we had not offered a false *alibi*."

"Mr. Preston!" the girl warned too late. "For —"

"False, Mr. Preston?" the Englishman was repeating in alarm. "I say, you were n't really arrested upon the information received by the 'wireless' and freed by a false *alibi?*"

"Yes, Mr. Dunneston." The American carried it out now that he had committed himself.

"It was this way: Miss Varris and I, you remember, went down to the 'wireless' station directly after you started uptown. And, some time after we got there, the police got into communication with the *Bahia*. That Plymouth police chap, who had been dogging me, procured for us the place of honor inside. Well, then, when the *Bahia* answered, the chief inspector told the captain to rendezvous his mates and the purser into a marine court, which began taking depositions from Mr. Hareston and the steward, and the 'wireless' began bringing them ashore.

"And, when they had their system in perfect working order, they discovered that they desired a tall, tanned American in a dress suit, with dark hair and eyes and a wounded wrist. Now, as I was both tall and tanned enough to satisfy them, and had hurt my wrist only the same morning, as I told you on the train, they gathered me joyfully to them, and if Mrs. Varris, who is very well known in Polporru, had not been able to swear that I had not left

the Tudor Hotel the night before till after twelve when the *Bahia* had sailed, I would now probably be the champion plaiter of neat rattan chair-bottoms in your crack penitentiary, Mr. Dunneston. Really," he concluded, "if the word had come at night and they had found me wearing my evening clothes, I don't think even the *alibi* could have cleared me."

"But the *alibi,* Mr. Preston," the Briton persisted, puzzled. "You said that the *alibi* was false, did you not?"

"Oh, that was the funny part of it, Mr. Dunneston," the girl put in for the other somewhat weakly. "Mr. Preston really left at eleven; but as mother did n't know that, she got him off easily without suspecting that she was perjuring herself."

"I see!" the Englishman acknowledged doubtfully after a moment. "But, obviously, you knew it, Miss Varris? And I say, Mr. Preston, then you were not only arrested upon the information received by the 'wireless,' and freed upon a false *alibi,* but actually,

you know, you might have done it after all, what?"

Young Preston watched him solemnly.

"Why, of course, Mr. Dunneston," he agreed, "I might actually have done it, as you say."

"Very decidedly decent of him to have let me off with only *might* now, was n't it, Miss Varris?" Preston appealed in appreciation to the girl, as the two moved down the deck together.

"But you should not have told! I tried to stop you," the girl rebuked him. "It was n't entirely your fault, though," she corrected fairly. "I more than half told him before I saw him."

"Why should n't we, anyway?" The American drew in a long breath of the clean, fresh sea air. "We 're four hundred miles nearer America every day, and I don't care what happens now! Only I do hope he won't change his bunk and leave me!" he put in feelingly. "I don't believe he will. You told him that we considered there was something funny in

"I know I must n't try to tell you how I — I feel about the wonderful — the incredible way you have accepted me through all this queer business" [*Page* 304]

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all this, — you warned him just the way *Punch* flags its readers when they are approaching a joke, — so he 'll probably persevere till he has ferreted out the humorous side of it. But — Miss Varris, where is your mother?" he recollected suddenly. "Not under decks in this sea, surely?"

"No, in Cornwall still."

"She 's well, I hope?"

"Very. It 's this way: You remember, we were to come back together on the *Northumbria* next Wednesday, but I received a cable asking me to come back a week earlier for a wedding at which I am to be bridesmaid. At the same time mother decided to stay for a month with Mrs. Brookingdale, in Cornwall. So, as my aunt, who has been spending the last month at Brighton, was going back upon this boat and had a whole cabin to herself, I decided to cross back with her. She was to have come down from Brighton to meet me at Southampton."

"Was to have?"

"Yes. I would not let mother come with me to Southampton, so I came on alone with Elsie, the maid, you remember? She left me, expecting to find my aunt in the cabin. But, just as the boat put off, this came," she spread out a telegram, "instead of my aunt to chaperon me across the Atlantic.

"Auntie was taken sick at the last moment, you see, and had telegraphed me to find a Mrs. Burrett on board who is a very good friend of hers and whom she also telegraphed to care for me. But I have just found that even Mrs. Burrett did not sail."

"Mrs. Burrett?" Preston repeated. "No, she did n't. I know," he explained, "because it is her cabin I have — or rather half of it. I wanted to get home as soon as possible after leaving you, Miss Varris," he skipped over that recollection quickly, "so I tried a day or two more at Plymouth and then cast about Southampton looking for some released reservation. And, as Mr. Dunneston has finally fixed up his property contest with his ungouted

cousin, or some way come into his property all safe, he was there for a booking, too. He thought then that my position was no worse than 'equivocal' and let me in on half of Mrs. Burrett's cabin, which he had just picked up. She did not wire the final release to the agents till just an hour or two before sailing, so I had no time to send to Plymouth for my things. I had to buy a new steamer rug and cabin trunk and get aboard."

"I was afraid that was it," the girl said. "I mean, of course, I was afraid that Mrs. Burrett was not on board. And my aunt and mother will probably know by this time and be worrying. There seems to be no one on board whom I have even met before, except you and Mr. Dunneston, so I'll 'wireless' them that you are here. at any rate, and that I am all right."

"I hope," said Preston, "that your mother can consider Mr. Dunneston's presence, at least, reassuring. Then I may see you soon?"

Some hours later he again met Miss Varris

upon the deck. "I have been back sounding my British 'bunkie,'" he said. "He is not going to change his cabin, but he is most decidedly troubled."

"About himself?"

"No, far from that. He 's really so bored that I think he looks forward to having me rob him more hopefully than otherwise. But, as you know, apart from the opinion he is obliged to hold of me, he really likes me and certainly likes you, and he 's rather used to worry about me, of course; but now he is worrying about you, too."

"About me?"

"Yes. For did you not consciously suborn perjury, or at least condone it, to get me off? I never thought of your being involved with me as an accomplice before, Miss Varris. But 'Really, Mr. Preston,' Mr. Dunneston warned me, 'quite — oh, quite entirely apart from the consideration of the possibility of your having done that little business at Plymouth, really you did wrong to condone perjury to free your-

self. And, I say, really the young lady might have quite seriously involved herself, too. For, you know, the perjury just in itself is actionable — oh, entirely actionable. Besides, might you not have shown that it was possible for you to have been upon the streets at that hour and robbed no one at all?' "

"And what did you say?"

"Oh, I said that I *might* have found some magistrate who would have considered that just possible."

"But," the girl laughed delightfully, "now he is beginning to consider my qualifications as an accomplice?"

"Oh, not quite," Preston replied truthfully. "I think he has finally decided about me now, yet will welcome me into his cabin to relieve the monotony of the voyage. For he is one of the kind who have crossed no end of times and keep on crossing automatically from habit whenever they can, but are always bored.

"Yet in many ways he is the best possible sort to have on the ship; for, though he him-

self is bored, he does more than any one else to make the trip interesting. Last night, for instance, before the boat was out an hour he had started the pools in the smoking-room and had the Anglo-American *entente* going on the high-speed clutch."

"And you, of course, felt it your duty to accelerate an alliance by buying a number?"

"No; worse — or better. I bought high field. The pool has separate numbers for the miles between two hundred and two hundred and thirty for the run since Southampton to noon to-day. Below that, low field wins, and above that, I win. And it really looks fair for me, does n't it, with this weather?"

"It does indeed! And it 's almost — why, it is past time to post the run now!"

"You forget that we are west bound. You have n't changed your time. Subtract half —"

Suddenly the whistle startled up all the deck with a single long blast.

"There! It is noon! Come!"

"Two hundred and forty-three miles!"

came back along the rail, as the two hurried forward together. "Two hundred and forty-three. High field wins!"

"Good luck! Congratulations!" the girl cried. "You have won!"

"Good luck, yes," Preston agreed. "Still I am glad that I won on 'field' rather than on just a single number — after hearing what my 'bunkie' already fears for me."

"Why?"

"Oh, he was telling me last night about a passage he made once when the pools were running very high — and they are running high enough upon this. Well, there was a fellow aboard who was a clairvoyant, and he won a total of thousands of dollars upon pool after pool by buying just a single number each night — that is, he did until the captain hear of it and called his officers together and told them that if he heard of any more such unerring clairvoyance, the ship would be shy some officers."

"When was that?"

"Several voyages ago, I think, because Mr. Dunneston considerately explained to me that the captain meant the fellow had been fixing the run with some officer. So he has had time to catch it."

CHAPTER XII

MANLING ON BOARD

ETHEL VARRIS awoke the next morning with a strange and unusual giddiness and lightness of head, which she attributed at first to the motion of the ship. But, as she looked out her port, she saw that the sea was still quite smooth and the vessel was ploughing through it steadily and easily.

For an instant she wondered at the strangeness of the feeling; but, as it began to wear away rapidly as she arose and went out to her bath, she dismissed it and hastened with her dressing.

As she came back from her morning tub, however, the vague feeling of something strange or missing came to her as she bent before her cabin mirror; but in another moment she had thrown it off once more, and was hastening out to the reassurance and the in-

vigoration of the fresh salt breeze blowing the length of the deck.

Under the animation of that crisp air, she decided finally that her feeling upon awakening had been due to the strangeness of travelling alone, and though, somehow, that explanation did not entirely satisfy her, it relieved her mind enough to make her the cheery one the moment later as she encountered young Preston at the bow.

"These big 'wireless' boats," she said sympathetically as, after the first greetings, the American stood staring disconsolately again at the flashing sea, "they never let one get well away from trouble, even upon the ocean, do they?"

Preston turned upon her quickly.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Varris," he apologized, as the girl showed her slight surprise at his gesture, "but really *you* now are almost as cheerful as Mr. Dunneston was yesterday just before you came up. He almost convinced me, you know, that I had taken to the sea solely

to flee from trouble which the 'wireless' will surely bring upon me anyway. And this morning you are suggesting almost precisely the same thing."

"Oh, I did n't mean to, please!" the girl laughed. "In fact I was not thinking of your trouble; I was thinking of my own case. Last night, just before I went to sleep, the 'wireless' brought me the comforting assurance that mother is never going to forgive my aunt, her own sister, for being taken ill at Brighton. I hope yours is nothing worse."

"Oh, but it is, Miss Varris!" Preston responded, trying to appear more hopeless. "Much worse! But I can't blame mine upon Marconi."

"You mean something has happened here on board?"

"Yes, Miss Varris."

"What?"

"Listen," he prepared her solemnly. "Miss Varris, the Englishman's — Mr. Dunneston's — shirt and sleeve buttons have been stolen!"

The girl gazed at him steadily.

"Oh, is that all?" she asked.

"Oh, no; the pool which I won was stolen, too," Preston hurried over the trifles lightly, "and mine and Mr. Dunneston's watch and a few other odd pounds from me, as well as about forty pounds from him, too. But, Miss Varris, think of — I mean, fancy one losing his shirt and sleeve buttons, can you?"

"Why?" the girl inquired, puzzled. "What were the buttons made of? What were they worth? Why — why, I heard that there was almost a thousand dollars in your pool!"

"Gold, plain gold. They were worth maybe a pound. And there were four thousand shillings, or just about a thousand dollars in the pool. But please don't be so shockingly American and mercenary," he went on with superior surprise. "Be British, and look at losses from their inconvenience, not their value, and consider the sleeve buttons! What is the loss of a mere twelve hundred dollars in vulgar value to the shocking state of finding one's self with-

out sleeve buttons? Besides, you see, I think he had rather counted upon losing his other things anyway," young Preston explained. "He had sort of conceded them, I guess. But he had n't thought I would take the sleeve buttons, too; that was what hurt!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Preston?" the girl questioned. "He had sort of conceded his other things — to you?"

"Oh, that 's so; I have n't told you, of course. But he has found out," the American explained, "that, after all, you really did not know me before we met on the ship, and so, of course, he lost his last reluctance to connect me with those diverting little larcenies which so enlivened the cathedral towns this summer, ending with that playful little shanghai-ing at Plymouth.

"You see, Miss Varris, the only thing which stuck him to-day, after he heard about our Polporru episode, was his understanding of your statement at Ely, that you and your mother had known me well in America. So,

when I was getting ready for bed, he set about clearing that matter up finally. He asked me where I lived before I went West to work. I told him in Minnesota."

"Did that mean anything to him?" the girl asked knowingly as her companion paused.

"Not much. You know, I told you that he has crossed the Atlantic no end of times; and he has been around the world about three times, too. But he's one of those true Britons who cling to British soil, and so make for Montreal direct from the dock and cross the continent on the Canadian Pacific and sail from Vancouver. No; I wrong him. Once he had to save time, so he did patronize the States. He travelled in our country four whole days, as the train could n't make San Francisco quicker than that. And he stopped in Chicago, too — three hours, for he knows all about the silver dollars in the floor of the Palmer House barber shop. But aside from that vital fact, I must confess that most of the rest of his American information is Canadian. So, when I told him my

family lived in Minnesota, he tried to recall whether that was a city, an Indian reservation, or what, but finally did recall that it was one of our 'provinces.' I let it go at that. And then he wanted to know where you lived."

"Where I lived?"

"Yes. I told him Philadelphia, and he knew where that was. He had a relative there for a while, he said. But you would n't know him, Miss Varris. He was a captain in Howe's army — that was back in 1777, or some time then. I think Mr. Dunneston is under the impression that Philadelphia is still the capital of our States. But anyway, he knows where it is."

"Good. And so?" the girl urged on.

"Oh, he gathered then, after a bit, that as my family lived in St. Paul and yours in Philadelphia our places could not be exactly contiguous in any true sense. And then by getting me to admit that our families could scarcely have known each other in the days of

Ethelwolf the Saxon, or even at the Conquest, or even, indeed, in our own colonial days, he finally drew from me that I *had* first met you upon the *Britannia* coming over.

"When I finally had to admit that unequivocally, he reached out sort of hopelessly for his watch and placed it with his other things under his pillow, and then this morning — "

"Yes," the girl said impatiently, "this morning?"

"Well, first thing this morning," Preston continued, "when bath steward knocks me up, I find old Dunneston in his pajamas poking about the floor, under the lounge, and even into the wash basins.

"I asked him what the racket was, and he took a last reluctant gaze under the towel rack, felt in all the shoes, and then came out with it.

"'Really, Mr. Preston,' he started off, — and you know how he says it. 'Really, Mr. Preston, I dislike to mention it after the — aw — unfortunately false character of your *alibi*

at Polporru,' he said regretfully, 'but actually, you know, my sleeve and shirt buttons have quite entirely vanished.'

"After such preparation as that, I had to laugh a little.

"'That all?' I asked.

"'Oh, I fancy my watch and some forty odd pounds or so have rather been taken too,' he said cheerfully, as if he had, as I said, conceded those some time before, 'but, you know, one has no great need of a watch aboard ship, and one can cash credit for any necessary funds. But, really, you know,' he rebuked me mildly as I would any one who, meaning well enough, had just gone a little too far, 'one can't quite manage it well without sleeve buttons, can one, what? Unless,' he picked up a gleam of hope at last, 'do you fancy the barber might carry them?'

"'I certainly hope so,' I said earnestly, but probably without the right amount of vital concern, as I felt for my own things.

"'Hello,' I said. 'Mine are gone, too!'

"'No,' he said in a hurt tone, 'yours are all here!'

"'Where?' I asked.

"'There in your shirt — mine were quite all drawn out!' he wailed, as though they were his teeth.

"'Oh, the studs and buttons!' I laughed at him. 'I meant my watch and money — the pool and all — are gone too!'

"That stuck him for a moment, and he almost forgot to poke about for his studs while he looked me over uncertainly. Then: 'Of course,' he said, as calmly as though it were a part of the ship's drill to remove a watch and a thousand dollars each morning from every berth, 'but your buttons are here!'

"The discrimination in that seemed to grieve him so that I thought he would cry, so I jumped down and rang the bell.

"'Steward — aw — steward.' I let Dunneston go at him first when the man came. 'I say, do you know, steward, whether the barber could furnish me — aw — cuff and shirt

buttons? I seem to have brought but the one set, steward, and they are quite gone. But you need fetch only the sleeve buttons now, steward. I shan't require the others till evening.'

"'Steward!' I called as soon as I recovered. 'Wait a minute. Do you know whether the barber — I mean, steward, my watch and about twelve hundred dollars, or two hundred pounds and some over, were taken from my berth last night, steward!'

"Looked for some interest, at least out of him. But of course he was British, too.

"'Thank you, sir; very good, sir,' he acknowledged gratefully enough. 'But I must fetch this gentleman the sleeve buttons first, sir,' he corrected me.

"'But I am not asking for hot water or — or sleeve buttons, steward,' I said as calmly as I could. 'I tell you my watch and over a thousand dollars, or two hundred of your crazy pounds, were stolen from me last night.'

"'Of course, sir! And very good, sir!' he

assured me again. 'But this gentleman spoke to me first!' he corrected again patiently.

"'Oh, excuse me,' I apologized, falling in with their mood as gracefully as I could. 'Of course, he ordered first. But bring along my thousand — I mean my two hundred pounds, as soon as you can, steward.'

"He agreed affably and started off, but he slipped up on his national training somewhere, for pretty soon he was back without the pool, but with the head steward, the foot steward, the table and the deck stewards, the purser, the freight clerk, and about every other higher critic out of bed except the chef. But what is the matter, Miss Varris?" Preston asked suddenly, as he watched the girl with quick alarm. "What is it?"

The girl was suddenly rubbing her gloved hands together and feeling her fingers beneath the kid. And quickly then she caught at her breast and throat and fumbled under the cloth. She paled an instant and then forced a smile.

"Oh — nothing," she said. "I beg your

pardon. You were saying the stewards and the purser — what did they do?"

"Oh, they asked us to refer it to the captain at ten o'clock this morning," Preston answered mechanically, still watching her. "But I am afraid Mr. Dunneston's lost interest. The purser has lent him sleeve buttons and promised him studs, too, if he can't recover his own before night. But — what *is* it, Miss Varris?"

The girl smiled bravely.

"Oh, I was wondering," she said, "if — if it might not help — Mr. Dunneston's interest in this if he knew that — the French chamois bag in which I was carrying my money and some stones and things which mother bought me in London and I was taking home and wearing about my neck, was cut away last night, I believe, and — and, Mr. Preston, does n't chloroform, or some other anæsthetic give a funny queerness and headache in the morning?"

"You mean," Preston started up, his hands

clenching, "that you were chloroformed and robbed, too, last night? Why, this —"

"Look, Mr. Preston!" the girl interrupted. "Here comes our English friend now. Really," she had recovered herself again and went on lightly, "he seems interested — at least, slightly!"

"Good-morning!" The Englishman had first a courtly bow for the girl. "Aw — Mr. Preston," he said, restraining the calm tone of his triumph, "the captain was sending down to our cabin not a moment ago to consult with you and me. He has just received, as I had rather anticipated, a 'wireless' communication from the shore."

"A 'wireless' from the shore? About what?" the American asked.

"It seems that the police have discovered as — aw — I rather anticipated that they might," the Englishman replied, "and as I — aw — indicated to you yesterday, Mr. Preston, that Mr. Manling sailed from Southampton with us and is on board!"

"Yes. I saw you considered that confirmed this morning, even before the captain could have received his 'wireless,' Mr. Dunneston, when you missed your sleeve buttons and, of course, you considered I had concealed my own things for a blind. But tell me, Mr. Dunneston, have you heard what happened to Miss Varris last night? How, sir, will you consider that?"

"What, Mr. Preston?" the Englishman demanded eagerly. "I say, what happened to you last night, Miss Varris?"

The girl gave him the matter rapidly.

"*Chloroformed* as well as robbed, you think? I say, shocking this! I beg your pardon again and, I hope, for the last time, Mr. Preston," the Englishman extended his hand to the young American when he had heard. "For, I say, robbing *her* after what I myself had seen would be impossible enough, Mr. Preston; but the chloroforming, too, makes it entirely prohibitive, I say, what? So a pardon again, sir! But in another way,

rather promising, this last development, what? Rather promising! But I have your pardon, Mr. Preston; you know rather that I always *hoped* it was n't you. I say, I always hoped it!"

"I know you did," the young American received the amends. "I told Miss Varris that I really believed you hoped it was n't I, though you could n't honestly think it."

"Quite so!" The Englishman closed that matter. "But since it can't be you, that gives something rather good, now, for the voyage, what? And, I say, I was fearing a dull passage, too! But here we are! We have on the same ship with us now the man who has been using us all summer. And, I say, first he was impudent enough to show us, in his most characteristic way, that he is here; and then we receive independent confirmation of it from the police. And dull this, you know, if he could be you, Mr. Preston. But since he can't be — rather good now, what? But come, Mr. Preston, we must report to the captain."

MANLING ON BOARD

"And may I report what you have just told me to the captain for you, Miss Varris?" the American asked.

"Please do. And —"

"But come, Mr. Preston," the Englishman exclaimed, with delighted impatience at the promise which affairs now held for him. "I say, we can suggest something to liven the trip a bit? Have you thought, what?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE SPORTING PROPOSITION

THE girl offered her little gloved hand impulsively, and the two men touched her fingers in turn, taking her into their newly re-established confidence in each other. And she found herself smiling with amusement, but perhaps with a little pride, too, as her eyes followed the erect, alert young figure of the American accompanying the staid, tweed-clad figure of the Briton down the deck.

She turned to her steamer-chair as they disappeared; but as she found the uncertainties of which she was herself a part much more interesting to her just then than those in the book she had been reading, she started up restlessly again to pace the promenade deck alone.

She noted, with an excited little thrill, that

already the news of the robberies upon the ship the night before had spread with inevitable exaggerations and distortions as the story passed from lip to lip. And, as one of the principals in the reports and the obvious friend of the others, she submitted patiently to the unconcealed curiosity and concern which the other passengers began to bestow upon her. She passed unnoticing by the bolder gazes, but smiled and thanked the women who stopped and spoke to her, and who — finding that she was alone — solicitously offered their care.

Facing the second day at sea without newspapers or other interests fresher than those they had brought on board with them, the men especially welcomed gladly the vague promise of some action; and as Miss Varris, in a group of her new-found chaperones, passed by at the end opposite the smoking-room, she could hear the groups within rejoicing vociferously and hazarding high hopes upon the awaited developments.

letting this opportunity for excitement die from inanition. Many of the women are truly frightened; but most of you men, I believe, are actually glad."

"Yes," Preston confessed. "We are. I dropped in the smoking-room on the way here and was greeted really with cheers, and — as you said — even from the English. Truly, I believe that though it scares some of the women, this is going to save the lives of no mean number of our British cousins.

"We have an unusually large number of the regular 'globe-trotters' aboard this trip who are always game and on the lookout for anything in the way of a novelty, or a sporting proposition. Yesterday and last night I really feared that half of them were going to die on the decks from virulent *ennui*. Between yawns, they bought numbers in the pools, of course, in a hopeless, somnambulistic sort of way; but they had no interest in winning just a little more money. Dear old Dunneston himself was bad enough. Of

course, he had a mild sort of interest in seeing whether I would finally confirm his conviction that I was Mr. Manling. But that could furnish him no real interest in the chase.

"But now that he knows that Mr. Manling is on board and is again convinced, at least for a while," Preston put in cautiously, "that I am not he, he's revivified most wonderfully. You would n't know him. And the captain's not only a Briton like him, but the best sort of an old sport, too. It was better than Thackeray to see them together.

"When the captain told old Dunneston that he had received warning from the police that Mr. Manling had sailed with us, but that they were yet unable to furnish any clue to his identity, except the description which they received at Polporru and had to discard, Dunneston almost fell over him with joy.

"'I say, Captain,' he congratulated him, 'I say, perfect that, what? We know he is on board, and have no clue to his identity?'

"'No, sir; not yet,' the captain said. 'Absolutely none.'

"'How extraordinarily fortunate!' our friend let him have that then. Of course, he gave the captain the ordinary English time allowance for thought; but I needed a little time myself. Pretty soon, however, Dunneston explained.

"'For it would quite prevent any possible interest in this if we knew, would n't it?' he appealed. 'Oh, quite prevent it! But now —'

"'Aw — Captain, no offence, sir; none at all! But you know, sir, this passage had started out extraordinarily dully. Even the pools in the smoking-room, sir, upon which one can usually count, have attracted only the most forced interest. And aside, sir, from the protection we could give the ladies, do not you think, Captain, that this extraordinary chance might be profitably employed to —'

"But you would n't believe the rest now, if I told you, Miss Varris," Preston broke off, laughing at the recollection. "Even I caught

their spirit for a moment and was quite carried away by them; and when they got stuck in perfecting their scheme to use Manling to protect the ladies and still revive the smoking-room, I was able to help them out a little myself."

"You mean, Mr. Preston," the girl asked, "that you perfected Mr. Dunneston's scheme for interesting the ship?"

"Right! Why not?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing! But — what is that going on down there?"

"I guess that is our notice going up."

"What for?"

"Oh, the mass-meeting in the salon to-night! Have n't you heard? Come forward and see!" He led proudly.

They waited till the first groups of curious readers scattered to carry the word to the others down the decks, and then they read:

"In view of the alarming reports which have spread over the ship in consequence of certain occurrences in the first cabin last night,

and to suggest an action which may be taken by the gentlemen, the passengers of the first cabin will kindly assemble in the main dining salon at nine this evening, by request of

"THE CAPTAIN."

"I see!" the girl comprehended. "Who is to address the meeting?"

"Oh, the captain and Mr. Dunneston, chiefly."

"And not you also?" the girl queried suspiciously.

"Yes," he confessed, "they asked me, as an American and the first one robbed, to help them with a few words."

"I thought so!"

"But I did n't want to, truly. I would much prefer to take you to the meeting."

"Thank you; but I can come with any of my present forty chaperones!" She turned away and, nodding brightly, left him.

He saw her only once or twice again that day when other girls and women were with her. But sharp at nine that evening she

was waiting in her place in the main dining salon.

Mr. Dunneston and young Preston, with the captain and one or two of the other officers, occupied the little platform at one end, where the orchestra usually played; and when the captain arose a few moments later, there was scarcely a place vacant in the whole salon.

"I have assembled you here, ladies and gentlemen," the commander started briskly, "not to soothe you with false assurances, but to acquaint you truthfully and fully with the situation which faces you passengers of the first cabin, so that you may take whatever precautions you consider proper to best deal with it.

"After having put this matter before you precisely as it has occurred," the captain continued, after he had finished his concise recount of the events of the night before, "I make no secret of the fact that I believe that the man known as Manling, of whom you all must have heard in England this summer, is

here on board with us and must have been the agent of the robberies which occurred here last night.

"I have formed this opinion, not only from the cool character of the crimes themselves, but more particularly from the information which I have received by the 'wireless' from the authorities upon shore, that Mr. Manling probably sailed with us from Southampton.

"And though I have this double assurance," he continued, "I make no secret, either, of the fact that I have at this moment absolutely no clue or indication of the man — other than this," he qualified calmly. "I am convinced that he is now present before me as one of you, the first-cabin passengers of this ship.

"I have a plan by which I hope to ascertain his presence in a moment or two," he went on, while those in the salon raised themselves in their seats and glanced about curiously, and a few laughed nervously, "but it is enough now to say that, not only do the indications, which the police were able to give me, point

to the fact that he booked first class, but we know, from the clearly declared peculiarity and fastidiousness of Mr. Manling, that he would not have consented to come except first class.

"It is safe to say, then, that he is here in the salon with us, free and entirely unsuspected."

Three fourths of the occupants of the salon now lifted themselves from their seats, and the nervous laughter and whispering became general.

"Appreciating then," the commander continued, "that we have on board — unsuspected and as one of us — a man who successfully relieved two gentlemen in one cabin of almost every article of value, including a very considerable sum of money, without awaking either or leaving a clue; and considering also that he must have forced the lock of one of the ladies' cabins and chloroformed the occupant, while he removed the stone-bag she wore about her neck and even slipped two rings from her fingers; and considering also that Manling, the remarkable cathedral-town thief who be-

gan his extraordinary career less than two months ago, and during all that time has been pillaging travellers steadily and securely under the very noses of our police, is now on board with us, and must continue with us till we land, you will appreciate the situation which faces us upon this ship.

" For Mr. Manling has as yet, as the *Graphic* well put it, become known to the police only as a series of extraordinarily simple, audacious, and successful robberies; not as a man.

" In the single instance at Plymouth last week, when he was thought to have slipped at last and exposed himself, in some incomprehensible and clever way he had so confused his identity with another that he tricked the police into arresting a man who had an incontestable *alibi*. The police then were back where they were before.

" They have been able to name him Manling only because that is the name which he himself has preferred to give when he addresses his impertinent communications to them.

" Invariably, as I said, he has carried through his various projects successfully, and often with really laughable simplicity, under the very noses of our police. And not content with that, recently he has begun to fear detection so little, that first he invites it, and when the police are close upon him, seems actually to use them to perfect his escape.

" Some say that he likes delicate situations so much that he creates them merely for the pleasure of extricating himself from them. But as he has consistently extricated, from those delicate situations, so much more than himself, I do not press that view of Mr. Manling.

" However, I can safely press the view that — unless we upon this ship develop abilities exceeding those of the officers of the dozen details which have been pursuing Mr. Manling ashore — he can calmly proceed in taking from us whatever he fancies and walk off the dock at New York unmolested.

" For, though there is no doubt that our

special service men will make an effort to apprehend him upon landing, they have as yet no further indication of his sailing than this: They knew he was in Plymouth last week, where he evidently tried to find passage to America — and found only the bunk upon the *Bahia* in which he deposited his victim for Brazil. Then they traced him to Southampton, but only by another daring haul he made there. For he robbed another American there just before he sailed, and sent the new steamer rug and the new leather travelling box, which the American had just received from a London dealer, down to our dock and had them brought on board with the first-cabin luggage for this ship!

"So when I received this remarkable warning of the presence of such a man, and these gentlemen," he indicated the young American and the Englishman beside him, "brought their evidence that Mr. Manling had indeed followed his box and rug aboard, I finally decided to let them lay before you the extraordinary sport-

ing proposition which they proposed to me this morning.

"I appreciate that there is positively no precedent for the presentation of such a proposition to the passengers of a ship. But the situation confronting us is equally without precedent. I can see no additional danger to any one from the acceptance of this suggestion; on the other hand, it promises complete protection to many. For if you gentlemen of the 'smoking-room' choose to carry out this suggestion and take the encounters with Manling to yourselves — and Mr. Manling makes the proposed compact with you — I feel that I can absolutely insure the rest of you passengers from the visits of the masterful Mr. Manling during the rest of this voyage!"

The applause which started from the rear, where the men were gathered, swept over the salon. Anticipatory cries of "Hear! Hear!" came from the enthusiastic smoking-room crowd, as the captain nodded to Mr. Dunneston, and the Englishman arose.

THE SPORTING PROPOSITION

"I rather fancied that my friends of the smoking-room, who have been in on our little pools, would appreciate with me the extraordinary sporting possibilities," the Briton began with gratification, "in this presence of Mr. Manling on board ship with us. Still, in presenting this suggestion which — aw — the captain has just mentioned, please understand that I do not propose it only to lend a higher and keener interest to our pools; I suggest it, I say, quite as much — if not more, indeed — out of a chivalrous regard for the safety of the ladies of the ship!"

"Hear! Hear!" two of the previously most dejected Britons burst forth with reckless enthusiasm.

"Our captain has just sketched slightly to you," Mr. Dunneston continued, carefully combing his imaginary mustache with his finger-tips, "a few of the known characteristics of Mr. Manling which led us to lay this proposal before you. But perhaps he has not emphasized sufficiently the most conspicuous

characteristic of this extraordinary thief — and the characteristic which I consider most essential to the operation of my plan. I refer to the sense of refinement — I might rather say, honor — which the extraordinary Mr. Manling has invariably shown.

" As we all know, he has never inflicted the slightest personal injury upon a single one of his victims. His remarkable shanghai-ing of the bobry drunkard at Plymouth — which he publicly deplored, you know — is the nearest he has ever approached to bodily harm to any one. Perhaps he may have chloroformed one of our fellow passengers a bit last night, but even if that were certain, it could n't vitiate the fact that Mr. Manling avoids violence at almost any hazard.

" And quite as conscientiously as he has kept himself from doing bodily harm, you know, Mr. Manling has consistently made even his bally burglaries, themselves, as little embarrassing to others as possible. I might, indeed, say he has made it a positive point of honor to

plunder only those who can well afford his pilferings and — more than that — to rob them in the most extraordinarily considerate manner.

"I recall this, because it was while considering this point of Mr. Manling's honor that my idea suggested itself to me — or, perhaps, I might more properly say, Mr. Manling, himself, suggested it to me by his significant action in stealing the pool last night.

"And having it so suggested, Mr. Preston here — my cabin-mate, who was the one robbed of the pool — helped me develop it from the original pure sporting proposition for us men into a most chivalrous protection for the ladies in our care!"

"Hear! Hear! What is it? What is it? Hear! Hear!" broke out impatiently and appreciatively from the English and Americans alike.

"It is, simply and in short," the Englishman cried, "that as Mr. Manling stole the pool last night, we propose and compact with him that hereafter — as long as he is left to

steal among us — he steal only the pools and we, on our side, offer him each night fair pools to steal!

"Appreciate, gentlemen," he explained as he saw the start of astonishment which greeted him, "if we cannot make some such compact to govern the manœuvres of this remarkable Mr. Manling, we not only lose a most extraordinary sporting opportunity, but we must leave him to continue his operations promiscuously — as he robbed Mr. Preston and myself and one of the ladies last night.

"I say, our police are undoubtedly making every effort to collect evidence to cable to New York to identify him and catch him when he lands. But, as the captain has just told you, he seems to have left absolutely no clue. So, unless we can confine him by this compact or somehow, he can probably continue to plunder us all as he pleases and walk off the gangplank at New York as coolly as he walked on at Southampton. So the captain agreed that this seemed fair for us.

THE SPORTING PROPOSITION

"Mr. Manling could scarcely suggest a fairer proposition for himself, either; as this offers him an unfailing crib to crack, averaging two hundred pounds nightly, while permitting us cheaply and safely to insure the protection of the women and keep the proposition a pure sporting one, as the loss of the pools — to which we all contribute — really hits no one hard.

"This implies, of course," Mr. Dunneston concluded, "that we shall each night run up the pools to at least four thousand shillings, as we have been doing — and to as much more as we will — and that the winner will, without taking cowardly or unusual precautions, pit himself alone against Mr. Manling. The winner will compact, that is, to carry the pools with the customary carelessness of the usual traveller; and let Mr. Manling compact, in return, to operate against only the winners of our pools! What do you say?"

"The gentlemen will all please, now, take paper," young Preston requested, after the

now vociferous cheers of approval of the Englishmen had died down, "and each may write upon a slip, yes or no, as he accepts or declines this proposition. Mr. Manling, as evidence that he is here and accepts, will put upon his ballot, besides, the monogram which was upon my purse which he took last night. And as Mr. Dunneston and I lead, please all file by and drop your ballots into the hat here!"

"Mr. Manling is present! He has agreed!" the young American cried almost immediately, as he sorted over the slips of paper.

"And the gentlemen have all voted yes," the captain concluded. "I thank you for having taken away from yourselves, in this strange but effective way, the more embarrassing possibilities of the extraordinary situation which confronts us. As long as the thief plays fair, I shall see that the officers and servants of the ship shall play fair, too, and in the spirit of this agreement, give him his chance at the pools. Is it the sense of the gentlemen that this agreement binds at once?"

THE SPORTING PROPOSITION

A middle-aged American broker edged forward.

"Mr. Tremont, who won the pool to-day," young Preston announced then, "asks me to say that he voted upon this agreement, considering it retroactive — that is, to include the pool he won to-day. His cabin number is seventy-nine. Mr. Tremont will play fair, and we will all keep away and give the thief his chance!"

"Gentlemen," cried Mr. Dunneston, "shall we now retire to the smoking-room and bid upon the next pool? Let us follow the spirit of our compact, and bid it high!"

The women clapped as the men laughed and filed out, looking at each other.

CHAPTER XIV

THE "PROTECTOR" ATTACKED

"HE has been seen then?"

"Yes. The police finally traced the porter who took the stolen baggage from the room. They now have his description."

"And they sent it — by the 'wireless'?"

"Yes. We had passed out of direct communication with the land station, of course; but the *Hibernia,* which is behind us, relayed the message to us. An American, they say, well built, six feet, tanned, dark hair and eyes, gray clothes."

"But that does not make it him, surely. It might be any one of a dozen."

"Not so many — out of this passenger list."

The two men talking in the next cabin prepared to go out again. Miss Varris, now thoroughly awakened, sat up in her berth and listened intently.

"Of course," one of the voices objected, as the door of the adjoining cabin opened, "he could easily have pretended to have been robbed of the pool to turn suspicion from him and to put up the game afterwards. But the girl — would he have chloroformed and robbed *her?* You have seen them together and she — "

"Lower!" the other voice warned. "Her cabin is about here somewhere. *Did* he chloroform or even rob her?" the voice returned then to the first discussion. "Could n't she have just said she had been to — "

The voices moved away down the passage and were gone. The girl found herself clutching the mattress and sitting up rigidly. She stared about, still dazed at the sudden awakening.

A note had been put under her door. She seized it hastily and read: —

"DEAR MISS VARRIS, — I am writing this to catch you before you can leave your cabin. I will state the plain facts first, without comment.

"You knew that the captain had asked yesterday morning, by the 'wireless,' for further identification of Manling.

"Early this morning, when we first arose, Mr. Dunneston and I together went to the 'wireless' operating room to inquire if answer had been received. We found then that we had been out of direct communication with land for several hours — almost since receiving our last message for the captain yesterday morning. But the *Hibernia,* which is following us about two hundred miles behind, had more recently communicated with land.

"Our operator reported us to the *Hibernia* and asked that vessel to try to get an answer for us from the land station. We waited several minutes, while we could hear the *Hibernia* trying to call the land station, when I agreed with our operator that it was useless and — either I went away with him, or got him to go away with me and give it up, as may be preferred.

"Mr. Dunneston was not satisfied, however!

He stayed, and in less than ten minutes after we left, the *Hibernia* got the answer she was calling for, and Mr. Dunneston had to call us back to receive.

"The *Hibernia,* then, as relay ship, sent us from the shore the description which the police had gathered from the porter who took the stolen things from the hotel room which Mr. Manling had entered, and where he had coolly packed. This description corresponded, in as complete a way as a general description can, to mine.

"Also, the pool which Mr. Tremont won yesterday has been stolen. He took me down with him to his cabin last night to determine whether his placing of the pool was under the spirit of our agreement.

"I need not say, of course, that I am now positively identified to the ship as Manling. On shore I might have continued to justify myself with you upon the possibility of Mr. Manling's being my double. But here on shipboard that possibility vanishes. So I send this

to you before you leave your cabin so that you can govern yourself upon full information to date.

"Very regretfully yours,

"RICHARD PRESTON.

"P. S. — I must warn you also of the most embarrassing feature of this. It is agreed that I pretended the theft of my own money to turn aside suspicion and bring about the arrangement I perfected yesterday. Now, as every one has seen us together and recognized our companionship, they are saying that you, also, pretended the loss of your things and the chloroforming to assist me.

"From this you will understand the manner you must take towards me. I fully appreciate your position and will not further presume upon your thousand kindnesses to me. I am still left at large."

Across the bottom, as an afterthought, was written:

"I am glad that, at least, no one has thought me capable of hurting or even robbing *you*."

THE "PROTECTOR" ATTACKED

The girl smiled suddenly as she read that last line, and re-read it, and afterwards re-read the whole note carefully and then crumpled it impatiently in her hand. Immediately she smoothed it out to study again the line at the end. Then she hurriedly dressed and went out.

As she came out upon the deck, she expected a stare, of course; but the free and unconcealed curiosity which met her and which brazenly ringed her round as she proceeded toward her chair at the stern, caused her to color red, not so much with mortification as with an anger which served to steady her in her determination.

As she came toward the stern, however, she was conscious, with some admission of relief, that the stare centred upon her was being diverted, or, at least, divided. She looked about for an explanation and saw young Preston before her.

"Good-morning!" she greeted him heartily.

Preston fell back, but recovered himself at once.

"Good-morning, Miss Varris!" he stammered. He drew her from blocking the promenade and brought her beside him against the rail.

"Why — have n't you heard?" he asked. "Did n't you receive my note?"

"Of course!" the girl replied. She looked at him frankly, and he reddened again.

"Then why have you done — why do you do this?" he pleaded.

The girl laughed easily.

"I knew you would n't see it!" she taunted him. "And you are always laughing at the density of Mr. Dunneston and the English!"

"See what, Miss Varris?" he demanded.

"Oh — your inconsistency," the girl replied. "And the particular absurdity which you are now taking seriously yourself and trying to impose upon me."

"What one, Miss Varris?" he demanded. She had roused him more than a little.

"I see," she still taunted, finding she was gaining her effect, "that I shall have to dem-

onstrate and explain to you, in the way your despised *Punch* has to reason its jokes into the English. Well," she sighed with resignation, "then let me ask you this first. You say that, in any case, no one can suspect you of chloroforming or robbing *me?*"

"No," Preston replied warmly. "No one. I breathe fervid thanks for that — not even the most reluctant Englishman can suspect that I would really have chloroformed or robbed *you.*"

"So I thought," the girl pressed on triumphantly. "The only way any one dares to make you out the robber is by assuming that I was not really visited, but that I reported that I was only to help you."

"Yes."

"Well, then, as I *know* I was both robbed *and* chloroformed night before last, you want me to believe of you what even the most incorrigible Briton balks at. So as I *know* I was visited as I reported, I *know* that the robber must be some one else aboard the ship — unless

you now prefer me to believe that you did what was done to me."

"I see! I see!" he acknowledged humbly. "And, please, I don't prefer that! But, Miss Varris," he recollected himself in alarm, "whatever you may know, or be willing to believe about me, can't change it with the others. And you must n't let me be seen with you. Oh, I can't tell you how I appreciate this! But you know you must n't! If for no other reason, you are here without any older person and — it will make you conspicuous."

"Make me, Mr. Preston?" the girl mocked. "You could not have observed my entrance and progress down the deck, could you? Why, truly," she forced on lightly, "the only way I found relief was by coming down here near you; then the stares were divided. So, since I must pay anyway, I 'm going to have my part of the fun. Every single, solicitous soul who took me up so officiously yesterday has dropped me as conspicuously to-day! They all merely sit and stare with the rest! And

what am I to do? What did you wish me to do?" she demanded. "Could I have cut you after having spent almost the whole last two days on deck here with you before them all?"

"No; I did not think that you would cut me entirely. But I *can't* allow you to do this for me, Miss Varris!" he protested desperately. "I would not have stood by like a mummy at Polporru if I had suspected what you were going to do. You had committed yourself before I was clear-headed enough to understand. But now I can't let you do this for me! I —"

"No," the girl agreed with cool assent. "You could n't let me compromise myself, if it were only on your account. But it is not!" she went on calmly, meeting his eyes. "Wait and you will see. You know that you are innocent and you think that you are the one Mr. Manling is attacking, and that I am merely involved in his attacks on you. But that is not so. The attacks may be through you, but they are aimed at me!"

"At *you?*"

"Yes. Of course, he's attacking you directly sometimes, for yourself. But other times — as just this morning — he is more concerned with attacking me through you. Recollect —

"Mr. Manling, the cathedral thief — whoever he was — robbed me first at Ely. Not content with that, he gave me the additional fillip of forcing us to put you, our friend, under suspicion for his theft. But, though I could scarcely feel him even as a mysterious personality, then I — mother and I — met his move with a better one," she raised her head a little proudly and her eyes lighted with a recollection of her triumph, "and we cleared you by putting into your hands the police investigation, which he must have expected to go against you.

"I began to feel this mysterious double of yours even then as a clever, subtle, intangible force. And I have thought that maybe he, too, began to feel me opposing him.

"But at once," the girl continued calmly, as the other watched her in wonder, "you laid

yourself and us open to his attack again when we scattered forces — when you deserted us after Ely."

"Guilty, Protector!" Preston pleaded.

"We kept hearing from the police how some one was making it uncomfortable for you by repeatedly robbing Americans in the towns where you went. The compromising position into which we put you at Ely kept you continually under suspicion, of course. So we sent for you as soon as we were able to. As soon as you rejoined us I began to feel that he was working against me again. Why, sometimes it seemed to me that he had made it a matter of honor to jail you, and maybe he felt that it was becoming as much a matter of honor for us to keep you free.

"Then at Polporru — that morning at Polporru! I could n't comprehend much about 'wireless' — I can't understand it yet, very clearly — so I thought at first, when the police gave that description of you which I knew could n't be correct, that the police had a plot

against you. But, of course, I can now see that it was n't the police. It must have been this mysterious Manling again. And I tell you, Mr. Preston!" the blood came hot to her cheeks at the remembrance, "when he was able to fool us all somehow again and he dared to describe you down to the last detail as you stood there before the police, I tell you I had to think quickly that time to beat him! But I did," she flushed honestly with her triumph, "don't you remember?"

"You lay your life that I do remember!" Preston cried in admiration.

"Yes; and though I had beaten," the girl continued quickly, "when he found both you and me on board this boat with him, he at once began to strike his clear, clever attacks at both of us again. Don't you almost *love* him for it?" she exclaimed in her excitement. "For this time he not only dared to rob me again, but you, too; and when he implicated you again, as usual, he gave me the final fillip in implicating *me* with you!"

"He did, Miss Varris!" Preston cried. "And you're right! He is not attacking me only; he does seem to be going for you, too! But can't you tell yet who he is any more than I can?" he demanded. "I tell you it is getting worse than weird, the way he proves over and over again that I am he. It was n't so bad in England when we had a whole nation of possibilities; but it is different here on shipboard. There are only two hundred men at most in the first cabin; and there is not a single one — English or American — who, by any stretch of the imagination, can be made to correspond to the detailed description of Manling now twice received. I mean, there is no one — except myself."

"There is certainly no one whom I have seen in the first cabin who is at all like you, Mr. Preston," the girl agreed.

"Then where is he? Can he be in the second cabin, or the steerage?"

The girl's eyes flashed brightly.

"No; he must be in the first cabin with

us. Who he is, I cannot say yet. But I — we, you and I, can make sure soon. We can catch and discover him! I've felt for a long time, as I told you, that he — whoever he is — has been trying to outdo me. But I beat him twice! Now he has struck again, and straight at me! But I think I can strike back; and you must help me!"

The young American caught himself up in his wonder at the girl as she turned to him. "You're a marvellous person!" he cried incredulously. "A moment ago I was bravely declaring that you should n't be seen with me at all; and now you are making it rank desertion in me, if I leave you to fight my mysterious double alone! Help you? Of course I'll try to help you! But I'll wager you can beat him without — "

"Hush!" the girl checked him.

"What — oh!"

"I beg pardon," one of the English passengers began doubtfully, stopping before the American. "I beg pardon, but this is Mr.

Manling, I believe? Aw — really I beg pardon," he retracted courteously, as Preston smiled patiently at him. "I rather — anticipated a bit, I say, did I not? I meant only, sir, that I am Mr. Close-Stuart, and I have just been informed that I have won the day's pool with my number 438, and will be only too happy to maintain my portion of our — aw — agreement."

"Thank you, Mr. Close-Stuart."

"I am informed," the Englishman continued cautiously, "that the captain has determined that the indications received this morning by the 'wireless' are a bit too — aw — inconclusive for action; and I believe that — aw — the gentlemen of the smoking-room have urged also that, under the spirit of our compact, no arrest should be made as long as you, sir, live up to our compact and are not — aw — caught by some of us aboard. So I can assure you that you shall have opportunity, sir, to carry out your portion of our — aw — compact."

"Again I thank you, sir," Preston acknowledged gravely. He glanced quickly at the girl beside him and caught the sparkle of appreciation in her eye. "But, Mr. Close-Stuart," he went on recklessly, "your wife is travelling with you, is she not, in the same cabin?"

The Englishman pondered, taken aback for a moment.

"And if she is, sir?"

"Oh, just let me recall that the object of our agreement was to avoid inconveniencing the ladies. Therefore, it might be better for you to have the pool paid you at once and take it about so that Mr. Manling can carry out his part of his compact this afternoon, possibly, and not embarrass Mrs. Close-Stuart to-night."

"My word!" The Englishman exclaimed his admiration. He looked over the young American intently. "I say, you mean to take it from me awake?"

"Mr. Manling probably can and will!" Preston rejoined.

"And he *will!*" the girl burst out, as the Englishman, after another ejaculation, moved away. "Oh, why do you always play so into his hands? That will be all about the ship in ten minutes. He will hear it, and can easily take the pool from Mr. Close-Stuart this afternoon. And then you are Manling irrevocably."

"Exactly. I am counting upon his hearing and doing that; but it won't make me Manling so irrevocably as you are kind enough to fear for me, Protector."

"Oh! You mean —"

"I 'll be as conspicuously on deck as possible this afternoon when, I hope, Mr. Close-Stuart will be successfully looted."

"I see; another *alibi!* And am I to be in this one, too?"

"I was going to ask, since more people would notice me if I were with you than if I were anywhere else, may I have my chair brought about beside yours again?"

"Of course! I did not know that you were

foolish enough to have it moved away. Then I shall look for you on deck here at three?"

"Thank you; yes, at three! But hello! There 's my 'bunkie' going towards the 'wireless' room. I 'll trace developments!"

CHAPTER XV

STOLEN GOODS!

THE girl stood watching the brooding Englishman and the American, cheerful and alert again, pass about a turn of the deck. Then she left the rail, and laughed as she confessed to herself that she was waiting, with undeniable impatience, for the afternoon.

She sat at luncheon at a table quite distant from the one to which young Preston and the Englishman were assigned, but she noticed that they had both finished and left the salon before she came in.

Directly after luncheon she sought out her book and, as she went up on deck, she discovered that the deck steward had replaced Preston's chair beside hers and thrown his steamer rug over it. But the American himself had not yet appeared.

Though it was not yet three, something

made her apprehensive and kept her from sensing the pages she turned as she tried to read; but she smiled her disturbance away. Yet a moment later, as Mr. Dunneston passed her once and again on his measured tramp about the deck, she hailed him.

"I am wondering where that rude cabin-mate of yours is, Mr. Dunneston," she said lightly. "See. I let him have his chair moved about here again; but he does n't seem to care to occupy it."

"Mr. Preston?"

"Yes."

"Oh, but I say, I am sure it is unintentional, Miss Varris!" the Englishman assured. "I say, surely he does n't mean that. I saw him but a moment back; and really, you know, I am convinced he meant to be here. But he was detained quite unavoidably — oh, entirely unavoidably!"

"But that was what I was fearing, Mr. Dunneston," the girl said. "He was being unavoidably detained — how and why?"

"Oh, they that were — ah — detaining him seemed rather to fancy," the Englishman explained deprecatingly, "that he had stolen the pool."

"The pool paid to-day?" the girl asked. "You mean that it has been taken already, and they think that Mr. Preston took it?"

"Oh, but I say, if he did, he hid it so cleverly away at once," the Briton reassured, "that they could not find it upon him; and there was absolutely nothing to prove he took it."

"Then why did they detain him?"

"Oh, Close-Stuart, you know, had just had it paid to him there in bank notes, as usual, before us all in the smoking-room. And he had been drinking a bit, you know, and was just the trifle poggled. So in rather American taste — I beg pardon, really, in bad taste only, I meant — he stuffed it into his outside jacket-pocket; and a moment later, when a number of them were crowding out of the smoking-room, he was joggled a bit by Mr.

Preston, and when he next put his hand into his pocket, I say, the pool had quite vanished. But after some — ah — deliberation, I take it that they are going to let matters stand as they were a bit longer till we can get the answer by the 'wireless' which we were trying to get this morning."

"What answer, Mr. Dunneston?" the girl started up suddenly. "What are you expecting now from the 'wireless'?"

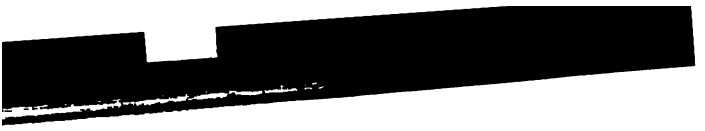
The Englishman was leaning down and critically examining the rug in the chair next to hers.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Dunneston," she remembered herself. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you; not now. I was merely examining the rug. Distinctive this one, what? It is Mr. Preston's?"

"Yes; why?"

"I was merely thinking it fortunate that he has so distinctive a one; for I rather fancy that, if he is not Mr. Manling, as you claim,



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Miss Varris, and as, of course, we all — ah — hope, that this will finally and conclusively clear him!"

"And if he is, Mr. Dunneston?"

"As finally and conclusively prove him so!"

"How?"

"Well, you see, in any general description, when the one who saw the man cannot personally identify him, there is of necessity an element of uncertainty and inconclusiveness. We have allowed that to lie in Mr. Preston's favor. But if he is found in possession of goods stolen by Mr. Manling, which can be precisely and accurately designated by mark and number, there can no longer be an element of uncertainty."

"I see. And this is what you have sent for and are expecting now from the 'wireless'?"

"Precisely, Miss Varris. The captain is now expecting, momentarily, a word from the police. They have been hunting up the London dealer who shipped the steamer box and rug now carried by Mr. Manling to their

— ah — former owner at Southampton. We have asked for his identifying mark, the number stamped on the box, and the serial number of the lock. The *Hibernia*, still following us, is making an effort to keep in communication with shore, so she can act as relay ship for our message. She could get no acknowledgment from the land late this morning. However, as our operator went down to lunch, she was trying with a higher current; so by this time, since the operator is now returned, we ought to have our answer."

"Then if this rug is not the one taken at Southampton, it can prove absolutely that Mr. Preston is not Manling?"

"Quite so! That is, of course, we hope so!"

"Thank you, Mr. Dunneston!" the young American's voice broke in. "He has been giving you latest developments, Miss Varris? Well, I certainly missed my *alibi* this time, did n't I? But I can't see how I can possibly need it much longer now. Some of the true

' STOLEN GOODS!

British sportsmen in the smoking-room are beginning to complain that it is entirely contrary to the spirit of our agreement, which the captain accepted, that he keep on trying to get information from the shore. They want to catch Manling themselves. But I can't say that I am ardently with them in favor of a further delay for their amusement. Ah — here comes the second officer now, with the long-expected ' wireless,' I think. And I 'm glad. Mr. Manling has managed, somehow, to confuse me with himself; but I can't quite see how he can make me have the things he stole. It was really becoming just a bit too much."

He waited beside his chair, confidently; but the girl, glancing at him, arose and stood beside him, as if a little apprehensive of something.

" Your rug, this, Mr. Preston? " the officer asked.

" Mine, sir! "

The officer compared it carefully with the message in his hand.

"I believe this is quite clear, sir!" he said. "But to make all absolutely certain, will you wait for the captain? He has gone down, with the steward, to your cabin to examine the box."

"Thank you!" the American acknowledged triumphantly.

"The captain, sir!" The officer brought Preston back from his quick exchange of glances with the girl.

The captain cautiously spoke a moment with his aid.

"Mr — er — Preston," he began then, facing the young American, "believe me, sir, I personally regret exceedingly that I must act as I am obliged to upon receipt of these advices; for I must say, sir, that I so admire your extraordinary audacity in making this plan which — but for the 'wireless' — I actually believe you could have carried out against us all, that I wish, for my own gratification, that I could continue merely to stand by and watch you play your game out. I regret exceedingly, therefore, the receipt of these ad-

vices which necessitate my placing you under arrest!"

"Placing me under arrest, sir?" the young American demanded.

"Under arrest?" the girl echoed. "Oh, you mean that Mr. Manling has this time —"

"I repeat," the captain said more sternly, "I repeat, sir, that personally I greatly admire the simplicity of your scheme, by which you concealed your own money and paved the way for stealing ours. And I will not now say," he went on, turning to the girl, "whether he was capable of robbing even you, his friend, to perfect his plan, or you were foolish enough to feign your part to assist him. But in either case, I can only admire his calmness and temerity in stealing, packing, and then sending down to this ship, as his own, the box and rug delivered into the rooms of his last victim at Southampton.

"I could not say that even there he overreached himself either — had he but remembered the 'wireless.' The difficulty of identify-

ing the articles upon his arrival at New York would have undoubtedly permitted his escape there. But clearly he had not counted upon the 'wireless,' and however cleverly he played the rest of his audacious game, he must now pay the penalty of his single oversight. I am sincerely sorry that it appears to be so heavy a one.

"For in the king's name I now arrest you, Mr. Preston-Manling, upon the twenty-seven charges here enumerated, ranging through all manner of theft and larceny to the shanghai-ing of an American citizen at Plymouth, and concluding with the crime at Southampton, in which, among other articles, you obtained that very distinctive plaid steamer rug now before me, acknowledged as yours and accurately described herein," he indicated the transcript of his message, "and also the leather travelling-box, Shibby, London, number 783, lock number 4721, also herein described, and corresponding in every mark and detail to yours in your cabin."

He turned to the girl then, as Preston still stood speechless.

"I am rather glad than otherwise," the officer said kindly, "that this has come up in your presence, Miss Varris. Ugly stories have connected you with connivance, at least, in this man's crimes. I do not credit them at all, my dear young lady. I would rather hold that one who has done all that is proved against him would not stick at harming even you, if it furthered his purpose. I am told that you merely met him while travelling this summer, and, therefore, you have done nothing more reprehensible than follow the dangerous practice of your country in making friends with one concerning whom you could know nothing. Therefore, I am glad, for your protection, that this has come up before you so that you can now govern yourself accordingly."

He waited a moment, as though he expected the girl to reply. Her face went white and then red as she looked at Preston. He had

recovered himself, however, and moved quickly to spare her.

"Come, sir!" He spoke sharply to the officer. "I am ready to go with you, Captain!"

"Wait a moment, please!" the girl then commanded calmly. "I thank the captain," she said, half to the officer and half to the curious group which had gathered about, "for his wish to defend me, and his explanation that I had erred no more than in following the custom of my country in judging a friend for myself.

"You all have seen me here as a friend of Mr. Preston's; and he, one of mine. I am now so placed that I must declare before you all whether or not I also believe him to be the thief known as Manling. *I think it is entirely absurd.*"

She caught her breath.

"Mr. Preston happened to mention to me day before yesterday that he had to buy a new rug and trunk — oh, box, of course — just before sailing. Has it occurred to the

captain, who professes to admire Mr. Manling so greatly, that he might have managed to have these articles sold to Mr. Preston as — "

"As he sold him his height, complexion, eyes, and hair, Miss Varris?" the captain asked satirically. "I will answer a Yankee question like a Yankee. Do you believe that yourself?"

The girl flushed.

"No," she said honestly, "I do not believe that that *was* the way he did it. I don't know how he does it, but — "

"Oh, I forgot to mention, Miss Varris," the captain broke her off impatiently, "as I did not think it would be needed, that the police have told me that they have finally fixed the identity of the thief at Southampton with the American who, under the name of Preston, bought the upper berth in the released cabin of Mrs. A. H. Burrett. The agent has recognized his description as the man whom he placed in that cabin with an Englishman named Mr. Dunneston. I think that is all."

The girl fell back.

"I told you that I was ready to go with you, Captain!" Preston repeated.

"But, Captain," Mr. Dunneston now checked the officer. He had moved from out of the group of the bystanders and stood as ally beside the girl. The circle about began to smile, anticipating amusement. "I say, Captain," he continued calmly, "don't you really agree that the established fact that Mr. Preston *is* — ah — Manling, is quite the best reason for not locking him up just yet a bit?"

"The best reason, sir?" the captain demanded.

"Precisely, sir," the other Englishman returned, unruffled, while his backers from the smoking-room applauded softly. "Precisely, Captain. If we did not know that he were Manling, really it would make little or no difference if you wished to lock him up. But being so, I assure you it will have a quite fatal effect — oh, an entirely fatal effect, sir, in the very satisfactory interest which has been

aroused in the pools. And as he is now known, sir, and will be held directly responsible for whatever he does, there cannot be the slightest personal danger to any one in leaving him still at large.

"Moreover, sir, many of us feel that this action of yours is quite entirely contrary to the spirit of the agreement which you yourself accepted only yesterday to save you from embarrassment. When the man was still all unknown and a menace, you then gladly approved the compact, which *he* held to; but *you* did not, sir. It was quite right for you to get this information from shore, but not to use it, Captain. I have been speaking with many of the gentlemen of the smoking-room, and particularly with the two who have been robbed; and they agreed that it is required by the spirit of our agreement to permit Mr. Manling still to try to outwit us; and if he continues to do so without being caught here by any of us, we have agreed to bring no independent action against him, but, as a tes-

timony to his audacity, leave him in undisturbed possession of the pools to purchase him fair defence upon his other charges.

"We ask you, therefore, under the spirit of our agreement, which he has kept and you must keep, to release Mr. Preston until the latest moment when you must rearrest him, Captain."

"And under the circumstances of an absurd mistake and a great wrong, Captain," the girl persisted, "you should release him and give him opportunity to prove the error."

"Well!" the captain cried, staring in bewilderment from one to the other. "You wish him released," he said to the group of men, "because you think he is Mr. Manling. And you," to the girl, "because you believe he is not! Really," he considered, "I can certainly see no danger to any one or anything, except you gentlemen's pools, if I leave him a bit. And it is within the realms of possibility, as this young lady feels, that I may be doing him a great wrong.

STOLEN GOODS!

"Of course I cannot release you, sir," the captain turned back with a grim smile to his prisoner; "but I shan't insist upon confining you too closely, if I shall so completely spoil the passage for so many of my passengers. I stated how truly great is my admiration for you, sir. To prove my sincerity — as long as I can see no additional danger from you — I *shall* give myself the pleasure of watching you play out your game a little longer. Paroled to play it out with these gentlemen, sir!"

CHAPTER XVI

"ANNIE LAURIE"

"FIVE hundred shillings? Thank you! Do I hear five hundred and fifty? Remember, gentlemen, that any accident —"

The voyage was nearing its end.

The easy, careless comradeships and intimacies of the sea were drawing to their close. Fearful to lose the new friendships, so hard upon their finding, the little groups all about the decks were drawing closer together, better to share the glory of the soft, autumn ocean breezes which followed the great vessel and lulled it gently from stern to stem. And the old friends, whose accepted comradeship antedated even the sailing of the ship that long, wonderful, incomprehensible week before, gathered together, too, and seemed to face the ending of the fleeting familiarities of the sea

with almost as much dismay as those who were never to see each other again.

The soft, silver shimmer of the early harvest moon above them recalled with added appreciation of the final hours that the voyage and the vacation were ending together; so the whole ship's company lingered the more longingly over that last evening on the open sea, as the great ship bore them on swiftly, steadily, to America.

Towards nine, even the few more cautious women who were packing up well in advance, and those who were already making out their customs declarations, or writing their "bread and butter" letters to their hosts in England, came on deck at last. And in the smoking-room the men were closing out the selling of their pool upon the last day's run of the ship before she would stand off Sandy Hook to await the pilot.

"Five hundred shillings? Thank you! Do I hear five hundred and fifty? Remember, gentlemen, that any accident, however trivial,

will require a slow-down and give this last pool to low field — without suggesting any of the major occurrences which will make the purchaser of this excellent chance the winner of thousands of shillings.

"Remember, also, that with the winning of this pool goes the privilege of the last trial against Mr. Manling!" the voice of the amateur auctioneer of the last auction-pool floated out, mingled with laughter.

"Come, gentlemen, this is the last of the voyage! Do I now hear six hundred shillings for low field, or one hundred and fifty dollars? One hundred and fifty, did you say, sir? Dollars? Thank you. Do I now hear six hundred and fifty shillings? Do I hear six hundred and fifty? No? Going — once!" the bang of the hammer became audible. "Going — twice! Three times! The low field sold to Mr. Mardock for six hundred shillings.

"And now, gentlemen, as there will be no pool sold to-morrow, since we will be off New York the morning after, I sell positively the

last chance for any one to win a pool upon this crossing, and — if Scotland Yard does its duty — the last chance any one shall ever have to encounter Mr. Manling!

"I now offer you the best chance of all — high field! We have sold single numbers only up to four hundred and forty miles, and anything the ship runs above that, gives all to high field. You all know that the captain is trying to make record time, that the coal is the best Wales can furnish, and that the sea is smooth, and the engines running without a hitch. It is really certain that high field will win, as it has —"

Young Preston followed the fresh bidding mechanically as he and Miss Varris seated themselves upon the deck without. He had bought one of the earliest numbers offered, and had broken from the smoke and closeness and chatter within for the glory of the clear evening and — the wonderful friend he would find upon the deck.

"Eight hundred shillings!" floated out.

"They are bidding it a good deal higher than usual to-night, are n't they?" the girl broke her companion's abstraction as he sat moodily silent after their first few words.

"Yes; as this is the last, they will probably put up over five thousand shillings. There was almost that much won to-day."

"And to be stolen to-night?"

Preston shivered. "I suppose so. He 's got away with all of them so far, has n't he? But let 's not talk about it. It 's not pleasant."

The girl watched him, smiling.

"Do you know," she ventured finally, "sometimes now if you don't quite make *me* believe you are doing it, you do make me fear that *you* believe you are doing it."

"Sometimes, Miss Varris," Preston admitted morosely, "if it were not for you, and if it did not involve my having harmed you, I think I would believe it. You believe some one else is doing it; but you yourself confess you have n't an idea *how* he does it — if I really am not he. I don't mean how he does the

robberies. Those are comprehensible enough, if he is unsuspected. But how has he consecutively made me have his height, build, complexion, eyes, hair, clothes, and cut, and — and even the articles he stole? I tell you I *am* positively ready to believe that I 'm a Dr. Jekyll with a Mr. Hyde whom you don't know. How you believe in me still," he turned about with wondering admiration, "is beyond me!"

"Oh, I!" the girl began teasing. "I —"

"Twelve hundred shillings — once! Twice! For the last time, gentlemen, I give you option upon this most certain chance in the best and last pool of the voyage. Twelve hundred shillings — three times! Sold! High field sold to Mr. Dunneston for twelve hundred shillings! Thank you. May you win the pool to-morrow, sir, and at last keep it from Mr. Manling!"

"Listen!" the girl interrupted herself. "Mr. Dunneston has bought high field — which always wins. What does that mean?"

"Old Dunneston 's bought it?" Preston started up gladly. "Well, I hope he 'll win

with it and at last have his go with Mr. Manling. It has almost broken his heart that he has n't had a chance with the pool against me — Manling, I mean, of course, Manling," he corrected quickly. "There I have gone, you see," he smiled. "When the whole shipboard impresses it upon me momentarily that I am Manling, really it is impossible for me not to fall in with them now and then."

"The whole shipboard," the girl rebuked.

"Did I say that?" Preston returned hotly. "I meant only — only all the others. Only all the others!" he repeated. "You — " he checked himself quickly. "I know I must n't try to tell you how I — I feel about the wonderful — the incredible way you have accepted me through all this queer business. I know I can't tell you that now. But I tell you, when this awful crossing is over, and I have had a chance to set myself right before every one and with you, I am going to you then and tell you — well, a good many things!" he threatened wildly.

The men, pouring out of the smoking-room, were passing in twos and threes and finding their places in the unoccupied chairs scattered between the women on the deck. Many of them grouped themselves at the stern rail near where the band was playing, but the larger number arranged themselves along the side sea-rails and under the deck cabins opposite.

As they settled about in couples, there seemed to come over all the mighty and complete establishment of the calm, night sea. Above, the moon still shone in a clear, bright ball which, as its rays broke and bounded up again from the fluid floor below, glinted again and gleamed from the water in a thousand shining fragments.

Preston and the girl had drawn back a little out of the soft, silver light, and lay back, silently, hidden in the deep shadow of one of the great lifeboats hung over the deck in the davits. From their darkness all the rest of the ship and the other people, even those who almost touched their feet as they passed, sud-

denly seemed infinitely separated and put far away.

And young Preston, after wrestling a moment with the renunciation he had just spoken, felt his determination slipping from him as he turned again to the girl.

"This awful trip?" she mocked lightly.

He caught his breath.

"You know I didn't mean that. You know —"

"Listen!" she checked him.

"It's only the band again, and — 'God Save the King!'" he interpreted, as he listened.

"Yes; but some of the English are singing. See them standing down there with caps off! Then they will play the 'Star Spangled Banner,' which, I am ashamed to say, most of us Americans can't sing. But they will play it anyway! And then it will be all over."

"You mean that you must go in then? Oh, can't you wait just a little longer?" He hesitated anxiously for an argument. "There is

a little Scotch girl down in the steerage with one of the sweetest natural voices I have ever heard. She has been singing to us the last few nights after you have gone down, and you have been missing it. Can't you stay and hear her to-night?"

The girl thought a moment.

"If the other women stay," she consented at last.

The band had stopped, and the band-men were putting up their instruments; but the word seemed to have travelled along the deck, for no one got up except the few who, for the better hearing, moved down nearer the rail over the steerage.

"Listen!" Preston said. "They are clapping for her now. The other night some of them — more Americans than English, I am afraid — threw down money and she would n't sing. She is not that sort. You will understand when you hear her."

The clapping ceased suddenly, and in the silence which fell at once over all the deck a

pure, sweet tone rose clear and full through the warm night air.

"It 's so clear it sounds like a flute!" Miss Varris whispered, amazed.

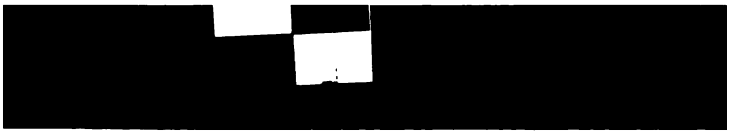
Preston smiled. "No, it is her voice," he said, "but there is a flute — her father with his flute — accompanying her. I could n't make it out myself at first, for they keep together on the same notes for a moment, but pretty soon the flute will drop and you will make out the words."

"Maxwellton's braes are bonnie,
Where early fa's the dew,
And 't was there that —"

The flute had dropped, as Preston had said, into the lower notes of an accompaniment, and the words came out clearly.

"Oh, it 's 'Annie Laurie'!" the girl exclaimed softly, as she sank back. "Oh, it 's 'Annie Laurie'! I never heard it sung so — by a very little girl out of the dark — before!"

"Listen! Here is the second verse!"



"ANNIE LAURIE"

"Her brow is like the snaw-drift,
Her throat is like the swan;
Her face it is the fairest,
That e'er the sun shone on.
And dark blue is her e'e —"

All along the deck the listeners seemed to catch breath and hold it in deep suspense till the voice began again. Then, as if in wonder and in awe of the spell which it cast, the little pure-throated tone came still more softly over the people on the deck and seemed to touch their tense figures with a strange gentleness which relieved their strain and relaxed them as they listened. Head after head bent forward and those side by side turned to each other unconsciously.

"Like dew on th' gowan lying,
'Is th' fa' o' her fairy feet,
And like winds in summer sighing,
Her voice is low and sweet —"

It had come once again with a catch of the breath, very softly and sweetly, and — as the

wonderful, simple little love-song has always — very personally and directly to each one who listened.

" . . . and she 's a' the world to me —"

The flute had stopped entirely, and in the last pure, gentle burst of the wonderful little tone all the tiny girl's power and uncomprehending passion sent it up full and clear again and alone.

" . . . and she 's a' the world to me —"

And in their very deep shadow and in their far — oh, very far — seclusion under the lifeboat's side, Preston discovered that he had turned to the girl beside him, and she had turned to him.

As they both recognized it, the blood mounted hot in him and beat even to his fingertips. High and clear above them the little girl's voice rang upon the last words. The eyes looking into his closed and then opened to his again.

"When this — this voyage is over — " the song had come to an end, but no one about either moved or spoke — "and when I have made it right for me to do it," Preston continued, "I am coming to you, as I said; I am coming to you, and I shall tell you — no, not many things — but just one! I can't say the words to you till then, but I know I shall always think of them as belonging with this moment — this moment with you beside me here in the shadow of this boat and with a little girl singing up to us from the deck below."

"Do you think," Preston just caught the words, "that you — that you must make it right for you to say — what you want — to me?"

About them no one had stirred, and in their place in the shadow they seemed even further from all the rest and more infinitely apart.

"Do you mean, Ethel," he whispered fearfully, "do you mean, Ethel," her name on his lips made him very bold, "that you, too, would

rather think and remember that I first said 'I love you!' here, at this moment? Oh, I mean — I mean," he cried, "can it be right for me to tell you now that — I love you — I love you!"

"Oh, so much better now," the girl's soft breath bore the words back to him.

"Better, Ethel?" he cried, incredulous. "Do you mean you can love me, too, as — as you have trusted me all this time without — without — "

"Without waiting for some one else to make me sure it is safe to love — you?" the full little lips finished for him.

"Oh, please don't laugh at me now in — in just the old way again, Ethel — oh, Ethel!" he pleaded. "I know that I am dull and stupid with you! But please — oh, don't mock me now and laugh in — in even your dear, fine, friendly old way again! For I love you — I love you!"

But the girl laughed softly, just as he had begged her not to do; but in spite of her

trying to return to that old way, there was something else in her tone which had never been there before, and which was as strange to her as to the man who heard it, — something which she could not have constrained if she had tried. So that when she tried to remove her fingers from his hot grasp, he only crushed them closer and drew her nearer to him till she lay against his arm, suddenly so strong, and she ceased to try to draw back and was still.

He bent down to her, and for the first fraction of an instant his lips touched hers. But then the people about the deck commenced to rise and pass by them. The girl drew away a little, but still lay very close.

"Oh, I can't tell you," she shivered delightfully, "how much more fun it was at first and how — how much finer it came to be afterwards — to believe in you against every one, everything, when I was so — so sure I knew you! And I can't begin to show you," she was whispering on, when:

"Mr. Preston! Oh, hello, Mr. Manling!" a rough voice suddenly interrupted and made them straighten up angrily. A coarse, lumbering figure stopped in front of them, and the man was staring insolently down directly into their shadow.

"Oh, pardon, Mr. Manling," the man grated, in drunken courtesy. "I was told I would find you here, but was n't told you were with your — your lady!"

Preston had jumped to his feet.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Oh, I was only going to say," the other cringed now, "that I won the pool to-day, as you probably know. My cabin is number 141, and I 'm ready for a visit from you — any time!"

Preston laughed, not pleasantly.

"I hope to accommodate you with a — visit!" he replied grimly, "as soon as I can return Miss Varris to the ladies!"

The girl arose and watched her companion strangely as the other man moved away. She

had never seen him aroused like this before; but she said nothing as he took her down the deck and, almost impatiently, left her at the head of her companionway.

She found herself wondering at him more than a little as she gained her cabin; and, "One forty-one," she mused, as she opened her door. "Why, that is the cabin just beyond this!"

She noticed that it was lighted and that the man who had spoken to them on the deck was already lumbering about within. And even as she opened her own door he came out and went down the passage away from her, without either coat or waistcoat.

The girl noted that he seemed even more under the influence of liquor than he had on deck the moment before. She shut her own door securely and had started arranging her things, when she heard another step pass her door, from the direction in which she herself had come, and enter the next cabin. Something about it made her re-open her door and turn out her light.

She saw then that the light in the little passage had been turned out also and that the door beyond, leading direct to the deck, was open. And as she watched the dark passage the man who had followed her and gone into the cabin beyond came out again and glanced down the short corridor in both directions.

He came opposite her darkened door and something stopped him. The man who had passed down the passage to the deck door without coat or vest returned quickly and flung himself into his cabin. "Thief!" his thick voice bawled. "Thief!" I left it here just a second ago and he got it! Thief!"

Running steps sounded immediately from the deck and from the corridor end of the passage; and with a quick start Miss Varris recognized the man who had stopped before her door and now was caught there. The steps flew nearer, and with a sudden impulse, almost before she herself knew that she did it, she threw her door wide open and caught him in.

The running steps passed and scattered rapidly away.

"You!" the girl cried in a wild, incredulous whisper, as she shot on her light again. "You! So it was *you* all the time! It was *you!*"

Preston, as he read the hopeless accusation in her face, drew away quietly.

"And five minutes after—!" She rubbed her white lips pitilessly with her handkerchief. "And five minutes after—!"

He turned out the light as she opened her door, and went out silently into the empty passage.

The girl bolted the door fast and threw herself, wide-eyed and tearless, upon the bed.

CHAPTER XVII

A MESSAGE FROM MANLING — WITH POSTSCRIPT BY "WIRELESS"

"WELL! He got away with it again!" The people at the breakfast table verily seemed to be congratulating her when at last she came down in the morning.

"Away with it again, and never a clue!" Her nodding acquaintances upon the deck seemed to pursue her to add their felicitations as she went out for refuge.

"I say, but he seems quite to have got away with it once more, has n't he?" Mr. Dunneston met her with undisguised admiration finally and caught step with her upon the promenade.

"And really, you know," he went on solicitously, "I almost wish he might get away with this 'wireless' business, too. Really, it seems he deserves it, what? Here he has made away

with the pools every night; and if we had n't his track from the 'wireless,' he might easily walk off the dock at New York unsuspected. But I am afraid now that any moment we must get word from land now — the American side — and the captain will be locking him up. He 's too clever to take chances with. And really, I am afraid that the captain will be locking him up just when I 'm to win this last pool and am to have my go with him!" the Briton mourned.

"Why, Mr. Dunneston, are we in communication this morning?" the girl asked, glad of any chance to occupy herself.

"With the *Salvadore* and the *St. Petersburg*, I am told, both Europe bound. The *Salvadore* is now passing us about a hundred and fifty miles to the south; but the *St. Petersburg* is between us and the American shore. We picked her up about three hundred miles away. She has not been in communication with land, but is trying to get some land station now to report to us."

"And listen a bit!" The Englishman halted the girl a moment later as they came under the "wireless" operating-room, and the faint "plu-u-ush" of the hissing current became just audible. "Our operator is back; the *St. Petersburg* must have been relaying some message out to us. That which we just heard was our acknowledgment — 'wireless' for 'thank you.'"

"I hope that it is not our message which is causing that trouble down the deck there," the girl said, wondering at her flutter of apprehension as she observed the commotion. "See! There is the captain and the second officer again — and the purser. And — whom are they stopping?"

"I say!" the Englishman cried, aroused to interest, "but they seem to have Mr. Preston again! But I say, they were n't to do that, unless we caught him at the pools, till New York!"

"Perhaps," the girl felt herself weaken queerly, "they caught him with the pool!"

"What?" the Englishman asked as he listened. "What 's that?"

"You 're an idiot, Captain!" Preston's words came hotly and uncontrolled then as the group drew nearer. "Good Heavens, sir," he objurgated a little more calmly, "I say, do anything you well please with *me*, but don't drag a girl into this fool's business. *I* can stand the racket, I say, till this wild trip is over, and I 'll show you what jacks you all are," he went on diplomatically, "but don't disgrace a girl by holding her, too, for the reporters to stare at." He hesitated impotently. "Captain," he tried again, "I say, I don't *hope* to convince you about myself; but, believe me, *she* is n't in this! She has n't had anything to do with any of it!"

The captain and the officers hesitated as they came up to the Englishman and the girl standing together.

"Miss Varris," the captain began unwillingly, "I am sorry that now I must —"

"Captain," the girl swallowed nervously

and then faced the officer resolutely, "I heard. Mr. Preston, of course, thinks he does me a service by denying utterly that I have any connection with the robbery of the cabin next to mine last night."

The captain started, but the girl, disregarding Preston's warning gesture, went on.

"But I prefer not to conceal it. I hid Mr. Preston in my stateroom for just an instant as he came out of cabin one hundred and forty-one. I do not know why I did it. I —"

Preston was trying to speak, but the officer shut him off triumphantly.

"What — what have I done?" the girl stammered. "What is it?"

"It is merely, Miss Varris," the captain replied with careful politeness, "that we are not now arresting Mr. Preston-Manling, or whatever his name may be, for the theft of the pool last night. We had no direct indication till now that he was concerned with that.

"Really, a police examination added to quarantine and your beastly customs inquisition would be the last straw now, would it not?" [*Page* 326]

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A MESSAGE FROM MANLING

" But I have just received final instructions by the ' wireless ' — relayed by the *St. Petersburg* — to arrest at once and hold for delivery to our special officers in New York, the man named Preston, now known to be identical with the one who was under surveillance at Ely for the cathedral crimes but was let go upon representations to the police now discovered to be false. He was actually arrested at Polporru, but again freed upon the representations of the same friends who are now known to have perjured themselves for him and sworn, for him, to an absolutely false *alibi*. The identification is further fixed, if necessary, by cables from Brazil, where the *Bahia* has arrived.

" And further, I am instructed to arrest and hold with him for complicity and conspiracy — to what extent is not now known — but certainly for perjury at Ely and later at Polporru, Miss Ethel D. Varris, upon whose false representations this man was allowed to pass our police in Cambridgeshire, and upon whose

alibi, absolutely false, he was released from arrest in Cornwall.

"I must, therefore, keep this man in confinement," the captain continued, "till I can put him into the hands of the officers waiting for him at New York. But as this despatch seems uncertain as to the entire extent of your complicity with this man, my dear young lady, in spite of the damaging evidence you have just given against him and yourself, I prefer to be as lenient toward you as possible. I believe that if you report yourself to the head stewardess, I shall merely hold her responsible for your care till we reach America."

The captain, with the miserable Preston beside him, bowed and passed on. The girl turned, beaten and helpless, to the Englishman; but he was considerately looking ahead over the bow at the clear, smooth water which the vessel ploughed through steadily, speedily, as it felt the nearer challenge of the land.

"High field is absolutely certain to win

to-day!" he lamented. "And I shall have no 'go' with it after all!"

. . . . . .

Fire Island passed astern to starboard. Ahead the big hotels and, under the glass, even the bathing-houses of Rockaway Beach appeared. On the port side Navesink and Sandy Hook took form.

Miss Varris put on her heaviest veil and, with the head-stewardess's permission, went out and stood at the rail.

She happened to be just below the "wireless" cabin, and overhead, in the silence, the faint "plu-u-ush" of the "wireless" hissed softly.

"What is that, Mr. Dunneston?" she asked humbly, as the Englishman, recognizing her, came and stood by her.

"We received word direct from the Nantucket land station early this morning," the Englishman explained, "that under cabled advices from England the ship will not discharge even first-class passengers till the police have

had a chance to board and examine us. Of course, we can avoid that scandal now. So the captain sent back word that he had positively identified and now holds Mr. Manling under arrest. He has taken upon himself the responsibility of handing Mr. Manling over to the police, and they will not, therefore, board the vessel till after all the other passengers are landed."

"And what have you determined to do with me, Mr. Dunneston?" the girl asked.

"I believe, Miss Varris, that we received no special supplementary instructions about you — in fact, there was no further mention of you at all. That 'wireless' which we have just heard was, I believe, the final confirmation that there would be no police examination till the passengers were landed. Really, a police examination added to quarantine and your beastly customs inquisition would be the last straw now, would it not?"

The whistle and the heavy passing signals of the great vessels in the Narrows changed to

the confusion and tumult of the North River. Even Preston, confined below, knew by the wash of the ferries and the puff of the tugs, and all the rest of the medley, that New York was at hand.

The great engines stopped at last, backed, and stopped again. One screw pushed forward, the other pulled back. At the bow, half-a-dozen tugs grappled and pressed to port; at the stern, six others bumped in, snorting, and pressed to starboard, and at last the great liner was straight with its pier. Then came cries and the rush and rattle of feet.

Preston sank back.

"Well, now they'll be coming for me, I suppose!"

He arose as he heard steps approaching his door.

"I think, perhaps, I can tell you who he was, gentlemen." Preston greeted the astonishment of the special officers calmly. "But don't ask me how he did it. That is what I myself want to know."

"Will you be good enough to accompany us to the captain, sir," one of the astounded officers recovered sufficiently to request. He handed Preston his cabled descriptions and instructions. "Obviously, sir, this man cannot be you."

Preston read the long cablegram through and whistled appreciatively.

"Quite as I thought!" he laughed. "But look here, men," he put in fairly, "don't blame the captain. These aren't quite the descriptions and instructions he received by the 'wireless'!"

"By the 'wireless,' sir?" one of the men asked, more puzzled.

"Yes. Hadn't you heard? Oh, I'll gladly go with you to the captain!"

He strode rapidly ahead of the others to the captain's cabin. But, as he swung in, he knew that he was robbed of his triumph; for the captain had Ethel Varris waiting him there, and, as she looked up, Preston forgot the captain and his other triumph entirely.

The captain, however, faced the accusing line of police officers fairly, handing over his carefully preserved sheaf of the transcripts of his " wireless " messages, and watched without comment as the detectives read them through.

" Let me understand you, gentlemen, again," the commander said humbly. " You say you are certain that no official ' wireless ' messages were sent after us either from England or America in regard to the man aboard the ship known as Manling? "

" None, sir," the police inspector replied certainly. " All information gained about Mr. Manling both from England and from Rio de Janeiro, where the *Bahia* has arrived, was sent to us by cable. The only message communicated to you by ' wireless ' from England was the first warning, sent direct from the shore station, that you probably had Mr. Manling on board. The only ' wireless ' communication sent from this side was the one sent you this morning directly from the Nantucket land station, warning you to hold your passengers till

we could examine them. The only message received from you was your acknowledgment and assurance that you had already positively identified Mr. Manling, and were holding him, and that you would be responsible if we held off till all the other passengers were landed."

"Then how," the captain cried in his bewilderment, "how under the sun, gentlemen, did I get these?" he pointed helplessly to the sheets which the officers had returned to him.

The men looked uncertainly from one to the other. The purser knocked, entered, and glanced about with embarrassment, then he moved over to young Preston and handed him a box.

"The steward brought me this from your cabin, sir," he said. "It contains your watch and other personal things, I believe, as well as the rings stolen from Miss Varris. They are all there, are they not?"

"All except the money," Preston smiled as he and the girl examined the things together. "Are all your things there, too, Miss Varris?"

The girl looked at the rings closely and then concealed them hastily, coloring strangely as she did so.

"All!" she murmured quickly.

"Oh, by the way, Purser," Preston asked, "did he return your studs and sleeve buttons this way, too?"

The purser looked sheepish. "No, sir. He — handed them back to me just before landing. But there is a note addressed to you in the bottom of the box, Mr. Preston, which you did not see."

Preston caught up the papers and glanced over them quickly.

"Of course!" he cried. "Mr. Manling not only returns the things he does n't need, but he also considerately gives away the plans he no longer has use for. I am afraid that most of this is pretty personal, Captain, and a good deal of it won't mean much to you," he said, "but as it explains everything, apparently, including the little matters which you touched on rather publicly yesterday, sir, I think I may as well

read it all to you — though most of it is rather hard on me.

"'Dear Mr. Preston,' he begins. 'I am giving my whole last evening to this for you, dear chap, for I fear many things must be explained. But to be fair to you, let me assure you that you are far from the first person I have poggled up for profit. Nor must you imagine that I misled you in all matters.

"'Actually, as I told you, dear chap, an ancestor of mine — who got together quite a fortune in rather devious ways, I fear — repented before he died and took a tour of all the cathedrals in the Kingdom. And, exactly as I told you, he enjoined this practice upon his descendants and made it perpetual with the property. A bit more perpetual than the property, indeed; for, when the entail got down to me, about all I could see in it was my pious ancestor's promise of sure profit for me in making a tour of the cathedrals.

"'Of course, I 'd been living by my talents for ten years or so before this. In my time,

A MESSAGE FROM MANLING

I 've done my bit of almost everything, and picked up more than a few tricks like telegraphing, etc., to help on in my trade. But just this spring I made a slight slip, which made it advisable for me to shave my mustache, change my name, and strike for something new. So, when I looked about a bit and saw how you Americans were travelling about the cathedral towns and, at the same time, my uncle passed on to me the hereditary assurance that I would find sure profit from touring these towns, I thought I would try it.

" ' I must say that, from the first, the profits of the tour exceeded my most sanguine expectations — especially since they could be so easily taken. Of course, I had to keep myself from being suspected. And, obviously, both the safest and surest way to turn away suspicion from one is to turn it upon some one else. So, you see, I have merely been carrying out with you, Mr. Preston, the first law of larceny, viz., see that some one else is suspected; the rest is infantile.

"'Even before St. Albans, I noted your extraordinary actions in the cathedral cities, and, though I suspected its true explanation, I saw how extraordinarily useful you might become to me. Therefore, I was careful to collect the different dividends of my tour only when you were conspicuously about, and let the logic of events take care of themselves.

"'When you joined with me at St. Albans, of course, it mightily simplified matters. And when I saw that you seemed to positively delight in the excitement of being suspected, I wrote the letter to the *News* at Ely, suggesting to the paper and to the police the simple theory of the thefts which they so thoroughly adopted. You will remember that my communication convinced them that an American was the fellow doing the robbing. So, when they wired about for confirmation of that theory, from every town where the thefts occurred, your name was immediately wired back. I, being an Englishman, was not noted in this connection.

"'I may say further, that the decided interest which I had myself already taken in the part I was playing against you was only increased by the lively defence of you by the delightful young friend, Miss Varris, to whom you presented me at Ely. When I suggested to her the possible danger of trusting any chance acquaintance, she took issue hotly — and from that point, dear chap, it became more than a matter of security; it became a point of honor, also, to play the game out against her. And, though I really hated to rob so charming a young lady, I wished to test as soon as possible the sincerity of her assertions to me; and, therefore, I relieved them of their things in such a way that, if they themselves would not suspect you, they must, at least, throw the serious suspicion of the police upon you.

"'And now let me confess to you the very sincere admiration I felt for the young lady who not only proved herself sincere, but met me at once with a counterstroke, cleverer than

mine, as she put into your hands the investigation I had started against you.

"'Obviously, dear chap, much as I would have liked to let up on you then, I could not cease with the honors so clearly in her hands. And by merely tracing down your luggage — after you wired for it — and by making my hauls in your convenient vicinity, I kept the police from myself by still keeping them after you. Of course, however consistently they kept at you, they could never get any proof against you.

"'During those weeks I was as careful to keep unobserved by you as by the police. But when I finally encountered you in Plymouth I was ready to leave England, and could use you better in closer and more conscious — co-operation with me, I might say.

"'I was very glad, then, to meet you at breakfast and find out exactly how matters had been at your end. And I prepared and primed you, as you may remember, for the

operations which were to follow. I need not say that I entered into the game with added zest when I found that my saucy but capable opponent was again at your side. And the next morning, in the train, though I felt that she was commencing to better formulate her ideas, I felt secure that she would not comprehend the instrument which alone seemed to threaten my immunity and freedom to leave the country — the " wireless." For, as I explained the operation of the " wireless " to her that morning, I did not point out the essential weakness of all " wireless " communication — the weakness which I had determined to employ, viz., the impossibility of any receiving station knowing from what source any messages come.

" ' As I explained that morning to her, any " wireless " station can scatter waves in all directions and establish communication with any other station within a reasonable distance — but there is no certain way of identifying the waves from a certain station.

"'Therefore, as I had already recognized the dangerous possibilities contained in the "wireless," I did not forget the little aerials which hummed above me that night I put Mr. Hareston aboard the *Bahia*. In fact, I very scrupulously visited the "wireless" room and, by carefully removing a few plugs, effectively wrecked their resonators. And, having already prevented the "wireless" from being turned against me, I made it doubly safe by turning it against you, old chap.

"'Therefore, when we reached Polporru, and the police and all the townfolk had assembled at the new "wireless" station, I simply entered the old station and, by graduating the current to give the effect of a ship answering off Land's End, I replied as the *Bahia*, and sent in your description in detail to the police. But one thing destroyed the full effect. In the train that morning, I saw that you had hurt your wrist, so I sent that along with the rest of your description. But that circumstance happened so to establish your innocence

with Miss Varris that she cleared you at once with her clever *alibi*.

"'I did not find out that morning by precisely what means she again took the honors from me. But, as it was clear that she did, I was very glad, indeed, to find her with you upon this vessel to meet me in a final contest. And, really, I began to regret that to beat her I had constantly to take recourse to the "wireless," which she entirely mistrusted, I knew, but which she could not understand.

"'So, as she alone suspected me and yet could bring nothing against me, I was safe in employing the same simple weakness of the "wireless," which helped me so at Polporru.

"'The first "wireless" message — the one which warned the captain of my presence on board — came directly from shore and was *bona fide*. The succeeding messages, until the one from Nantucket, were mine, and manipulated in this simple manner:

"'Since the ship has but one "wireless" operator, he was often out of the cabin. Now,

I had been given free access to the "wireless" room, and I was able to operate. Therefore, whenever I wished the captain to receive a message, I merely had to wait till I was left alone in the "wireless" room, and then send my message to the *Hibernia,* which was following us.

"'I informed the *Hibernia* that I was the shore operator with messages for this ship. I gave the message to the *Hibernia* then, and left. The *Hibernia,* believing she had really received a message for us from shore, then called us by "wireless" and sent back my message to the ship for our regular operator to take down.

"'In that way I composed a message to fit every occasion and had it arrive when I needed it. Of course, I took risks. Many passengers heard my sending. But the "wireless" room is away from the officers, and the others supposed our regular operator was at work.

"'As we approached the American side, I merely had to repeat the same operation *via*

the *St. Petersburg*. And, dear old chap, believe me, I would not have put it over you so violently these last days — particularly have had you locked up as I did to-day — for the mere carrying out of my little game. As you know now, I had to do it to get off the ship myself. Really, I had no choice. For, you see, I rather feared, as it developed, that the beastly old *Bahia* had reached Brazil, and that my true description must be on the cables, even if our stupid police had not already gained it in England and cabled it across. Truly, I felt that I was cutting it a bit too fine unless I could have the police held off until after I landed. Therefore, dear chap, I had to lock you up. But, to compensate you for that as much as possible, I took care to have your really most wonderful friend, Miss Varris, held with you till you could read her this — if, as I scarcely believe, it may still be necessary. For I more than half suspect that this morning, though she was meek enough, she had begun to appreciate that the night before you had

gone down to punch the head of the beastly, drunken boor, whom I sent to insult you; for I myself felt so certain that that would be your impulse — to punish him at once — that I followed him a bit ahead of you and, after collecting the pool, got away by the deck door just before you tramped in to reprove him.

"'But now, old chap, for America and — oh, I can't myself quite say what else yet, you know. But, dear old Preston, I am glad to leave you this to assuage the captain, the dutiful representative of Scotland Yard, and any others who may still be dubious about you — a company which, I hope, does not longer number — Miss Varris.'"

Preston's voice dropped.

"That is all, sir?" the captain inquired, crestfallen.

"That is all which in any way concerns you, sir, or these officers, and I believe this is sufficient explanation of the facts?"

"Oh, quite!" the captain replied, glancing

about the little circle of officers who silently bowed their assent. "But, tell me, how does he sign himself, sir?"

Preston smiled.

"Oh, he merely says at the end —

"'Again many, many thanks, my dear young friend, for the repeated service you have been to me. As I have used this name with you for the past few weeks, let me still remain

"'DUNNESTON.'"

"Thank you, sir!" The captain turned to consult with the officers.

Young Preston drew the girl aside. She had arisen and faced him with steady eyes.

"What else does he say?" she asked haltingly.

"That which does n't concern the captain or the others?"

"Yes."

"Oh, he says he is glad that his little game with us appears to have been of assistance in bringing about the — the happy result toward which, he says, he has really labored earnestly."

"Is that all else he says?"

"All except some sort of a queer line here as a postscript. It seems to have been scribbled in pencil after the rest was written.

"'Dear P.,' he says, 'believe me, I hated especially to have to use Miss Varris to perfect my plans the way I did — the anæsthetizing and robbing again, and all. Of course, I have no use for her things, which I am here returning. And finally, as my gift to you both and to make everything up to you both as well as I can, ask to see her rings.'"

"Yes," the girl murmured vaguely.

"Why?" the other caught her up suddenly then. "Why did you ask if he said any more and — and why did he say that?" he demanded. "Let me see the rings he gave back to you! Why — they 're three!" he exclaimed. "I thought that only two were taken."

"Only two were."

"Oh; then he meant to make things up with you by giving you another?" Preston wondered at first. "But no!" he denied.

"He says a gift to us both! What kind of a ring is that — let me see it!" he commanded.

"Here it is!"

"It 's a single diamond — why, it 's an engagement ring, of course!" he cried incautiously, as he grasped both it and the hand which held it. "And he 's had the — the brass to scratch our initials in it!"

"Hush!" the girl warned. "Put it away!"

"I won't — unless I may put it on you!"

"Quickly, then!" she whispered. "Quickly!"

And quickly — very quickly indeed, the young American moved. But before he could well do more than slip the little band of stolen gold upon her finger and conceal it and her hand with it under his own, the captain had turned again and come to the young people. He cleared his throat nervously. But as he saw them better, his embarrassment melted quickly away into a smile.

"Your friends who came down to meet you," he said, glancing out his window overlooking the decks, "have evidently become

anxious waiting for you upon the dock and are now storming the ship. Before you go to them, I had intended to ask," he looked from one to the other, "your forgiveness. But instead, may I not now be the first to offer to you —"

A hurrying step from without interrupted, and the "wireless" operator burst in upon them.

"Message for Mr. Preston!" he cried, handing it over, smiling. "I was still up in the room testing the apparatus when I heard our call from somewhere, and this came in for you, sir!"

Preston snatched it and read it hurriedly. He, too, smiled largely, and handed it over to the girl beside him.

"You do not know at what station he is?" he asked the operator.

"No, sir. It is impossible to tell. He may have sent it even from one of the other ship stations in any of the slips about, and there are several shore stations near here in New

York. But, sir," he recalled, "if I merely send your answer blindly, he will get it, and — I think, sir, *he* would wait for an answer!"

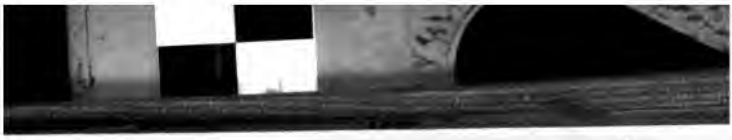
"I think he would!" Preston agreed heartily. "Then send back to him this for me," he wrote hurriedly. "'Thanks! They *are* in order!'"

"And now, Captain," the young American returned to the commander as the "wireless" operator hurried off, "I know, of course, what you were about to say, and I — we thank you. But you cannot now be the first to offer them, sir!"

"Not the first?" the captain asked in surprise, not having entirely grasped the meaning of the interruption the instant before. "Why, I did not know that this was standing before — before —"

"No, Captain," Preston finished for him. "And it was not. It did not happen finally till just a moment ago."

"Ah, then am I not the first, Miss Varris?" he appealed.

"No, Captain," she laughed. "You helped us a very great deal, sir, too. But he — he helped us, oh, very much more. And, you see, just the moment before you were speaking, Mr. Dunneston had already sent us his congratulations," she held out the message to him, "by 'wireless'!"

THE END